

Treasure

IN THIS CITY

By Jane Nickerson

*Everyone
in our
new town
had lived
there forever.*

*Everyone
was related to
everyone else.*

*Everyone
attended
the local
Protestant
churches.*

*Everyone
but us.*

I did a great deal of growing up in a single moment on a Mississippi hilltop. Mississippi looks celestial in the spring, with its trees dripping with wisteria and blossoms billowing everywhere. Due to the way I was feeling, however, spring seemed less than heavenly.

Our family had recently moved to a small town in Mississippi, USA, for my husband's job. He was busy with his new responsibilities, and he was rarely home. I, meanwhile, cared for our three young children and was so lonely I could hardly bear it. I was used to having a happy network of other Latter-day Saint mothers to visit with and to take turns babysitting each others' children. Here, the closest Latter-day Saint families lived nearly an hour away, and I could see no prospect of making friends in my town. It seemed like everyone had lived there forever, was related to everyone else, and attended the local Protestant churches—everyone but us. It was easy to feel like the community was closed to us.

I had tried to reach out to people in the neighborhood by introducing myself and our children at houses that had toys in the yard, but it felt like no one needed anyone new in their life. I would catch myself chatting too long at the checkout counter of the grocery store or at the circulation desk of the library and then feel like a fool. I lived for the hour my husband came home from work and for

Sundays, when we would make the long drive to church and I could talk to other adults.

I tried to fill the empty ache of loneliness by teaching and playing with our children. I searched the scriptures more than ever before, seeking comfort and guidance. I spent long moments in prayer because Heavenly Father was someone I could *always* talk to. So far away from friends and family, I felt myself slowly growing closer and closer to Him.

Early each morning before my husband left for work, I would go for long walks, thinking and praying as I hiked the woods and hills around our home. One day I climbed farther and farther until at last I stood exhausted at the very top of a hill. I fell to my knees. As I prayed, warmth flooded over me, and I knew—I *knew*—that God was with me.

Two thoughts came into my mind. One was the words of a poem my grandfather used to quote titled “When God Wants a Man.”¹ It says that when the Lord wants to mold a person “to play the noblest part,” He “makes him lonely so that only God’s high messages shall reach him.” I felt that this was happening to me, and oh, I wanted to hear those “high messages”!

The other thought was what I had read in Doctrine and Covenants 111:2 earlier that morning. I had read it without really paying attention, thinking of it only as it applied to Church history, but now it leaped into my



mind: “I have much treasure in this city for you.” In that moment I knew that we would be fine in this town, that the Lord had sent us here for a reason, and that I would be equal to the task.

I took action immediately to get to know people. I decided that the key to breaking down the social barriers was to serve. I joined a charitable organization called the Junior Auxiliary, a historical society, and a local homemakers’ club. I offered to work in the nursery for a couple of the churches during their Bible School week and met people that way. I enrolled my four-year-old in a preschool and then invited his classmates over for playdates so that I could meet their mothers. From there, friendships developed much more quickly than I would have thought possible a few weeks earlier.

We lived in Mississippi for 24 years and met many wonderful people. Our children grew up as southerners, and we were known as “that big Mormon family.” When our teenagers were involved in a terrible automobile accident a few years ago, several of the local churches prayed for our family during their Sunday services. Offers of help poured into our home. The whole town put its arms around us during our difficult time.

There was indeed “much treasure” in that city, but in those early days I had to wade through my own loneliness to find it. And all the while, as I was wading, Heavenly Father held me by the hand, gently leading. As I poured out my heart in prayer to Him that spring morning, He knew I was finally ready to listen to His message for me. He poured comfort and inspiration into my heart to fill my needs. That lesson about His tender mercies and the power of prayer has never left me. ■

NOTE

1. Angela Morgan, in Scott T. Brown, ed., *It Can Be Done: Poems for Hardship, Sacrifice and Dominion* (2009), 24–28.