

Similarities **AND**

By Heather McOmber

That Relief Society lesson helped me see myself, and others, in a way I never had before.

I will never forget a particular Relief Society lesson I heard in a young single adult ward. At the start of the lesson there was a blank chart on a white board with two columns. The first column was labeled “Similarities” and the second

“Differences.” The teacher began by asking us to list the similarities between a married Relief Society sister and a single Relief Society sister. There was an almost audible groan and a collective mind freeze. One sister started with a hint of sarcasm, stating: “Well, we are all



Differences

female.” And that seemed to neatly summarize how we all felt on the subject.

But the teacher persisted. Gradually hearts opened and the list of similarities began to grow: hopes, fears, strengths, weaknesses, responsibilities, talents, the gospel, covenants, faith, courage, potential, pain, sorrows, fatigue, and personal need of the Atonement.

The list continued until the teacher had to ask us to move onto listing our differences. Of course, everyone immediately called out: “husband!”

But then there was a stunned silence. Surely there *had* to be more than that. The list included a few feeble attempts at finding differences—things like “we may or may not have children” or “we have different responsibilities.” Most of us, though, were simply stunned by the fact that what we thought would be the short list ended up being the long list, and what we thought would be the long list was actually the short list.

Until that lesson, I had not realized how different I had let myself believe I was from other sisters in the gospel simply because they are married and I am not. This simple activity instilled in me a bond of unity with my sisters. I saw with new eyes. I realized that even in a world where people are often

prone to focus on what makes us different from each other, sisters in the gospel *do* have a lot in common. We need not act based on fear of rejection or the assumption that we have nothing to offer each other. Seeing how alike we truly are has helped me feel confident to stand as an equal with my sisters in the gospel.

But the exercise reached even further still. Not only did it build a bridge between married sisters and me but also between all of God’s children and me. That we are all His children is our common heritage. Our differences lie only in the details and packaging of our lives. Satan and his work thrive by enhancing our differences—teaching us that we cannot relate to one another. But the similarities among Heavenly Father’s sons and daughters are so great that if we choose to focus on them instead of on our differences, unity is bound to increase (see Moses 7:18).

I will always be grateful for that lesson that helped me see others with new eyes, focused my vision on similarities, and brought me to a more understanding state of mind and heart. ■

For additional reading, see Jan Underwood, “Seeing Beyond the Category: Reflections on A Single Life,” Ensign, Mar. 1984, 27.

