



MY SEARCH FOR Motherhood

*I may never have children of my own in this lifetime,
but Heavenly Father has not left me childless.*

During sacrament meeting on any given Sunday, I sit in the middle spot on a middle bench in the middle of our chapel.

Except on Mother's Day.

On Mother's Day, I choose an aisle seat in the back near the door.

Mother's Day can be an emotionally trying day for any woman; feelings of inadequacy, disappointment, loss, or a variety of other circumstances may contribute to this. As an unmarried woman in my 40s with a medical condition that often causes infertility, I probably will never be a mother to children of my own in this lifetime. This heartbreak can sometimes make sacrament meeting on Mother's Day more than I can bear. In my ward all the women are invited to stand and receive a Mother's Day gift, maybe a flower or a chocolate bar. Despite the good intentions behind this ward tradition, I usually feel undeserving of and disheartened by a gift that I have little hope of earning in the typical way.

For weeks before Mother's Day I begin preparing myself emotionally: reminding myself that "we are all mothers"¹; thinking of women I should remember rather than dwelling on my own disappointments; acknowledging that even women who do have children may find Mother's Day uncomfortable; telling myself that I am a good aunt, teacher, and friend to other people's children; and trying to think of Mother's Day as just another Sunday. I am never quite sure how well these tactics will work, so I sit near the door of the chapel, poised to exit if my heartbreak becomes too apparent.

Blessed by the Scott Family

One year I found Mother's Day to be particularly difficult. I was just coming to accept that I might not have children in this life and was grieving that loss as well as battling challenges with my medical condition. But not wanting to be defeated, I forced myself out of bed, got dressed, and drove to church, determined to obediently attend my meetings. Despite my best efforts, though, I was in tears before pulling out of the driveway and for most of the 25-minute drive. In the parking lot of the meetinghouse, I somehow suppressed the lump in my throat, forced back the tears, went in, and took my position on the aisle seat of an empty pew toward the back of the chapel.

And then a blessing named the Scott family arrived. Having gone through a period of infertility themselves, they must have realized that Mother's Day might be difficult for me. Sister Scott brought her three children and sat by me on the pew. With a family next to me, I didn't feel quite so single and childless.

Brother Scott, a counselor in our bishopric, was the first speaker. He commented that speaking on Mother's Day was a challenge because of the feelings that it can evoke for many, if not all, members of the congregation. His thoughtful words spoke to my heart as well as to my situation. My emotions got the best of me, and I knew that to avoid embarrassment, I had better leave before the Primary children sang their musical number.

I went to my car where I sat reading my scriptures, crying over my heartbreak, and feeling ashamed of myself for not



MOTHERHOOD IS ETERNAL

“Female roles did not begin on earth, and they do not end here.

A woman who treasures motherhood on earth will treasure motherhood in the world to come, and ‘where [her] treasure is, there will [her] heart be also’ (Matthew 6:21). By developing a mother heart, each girl and woman prepares for her divine, eternal mission of motherhood.”

Julie B. Beck, “A Mother Heart,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2004, 76.

having the spiritual strength to stay in the meeting. I waited until I was sure that sacrament meeting was over and that the Mother’s Day gift—it was a rose that year—had been handed out, and then I returned for Sunday School and Relief Society. I had convinced myself that no one had noticed my exit and that my face showed no evidence of crying, so I didn’t think much of Brother Scott’s request when he asked to see me in the bishop’s office after church.

I was completely caught off guard when I walked in to discover that he had not only noticed my exit from sacrament meeting but had also saved a rose for me. I could not hold back the tears as he told me that I deserved it as much as anyone and gave specific examples of my positive influence as a woman and member of our ward. Although I was embarrassed by my tears and unsure that I wanted the gift, I was touched and grateful that someone was aware of my pain and conscious of my influence as a woman. Later that day I knelt in prayer to thank my Heavenly Father for sending this sweet family to comfort me.

Seeking Opportunities for Motherhood

After that Mother’s Day, I became more diligent in my search for what I call “alternative opportunities for motherhood.” The more I sought for and opened myself to these opportunities, the more I found them. I discovered that I could be an example of righteous womanhood for children and youth in my family, ward, and community. I served as a trusted adult in teenagers’ lives, confirming the truths their parents were teaching them. I volunteered to babysit so couples in the ward could attend the temple or take care of pressing family issues. I held a baby or followed a curious toddler in the hallway at church so the mother could listen to the lesson or attend to her calling. In sacrament meeting, I sat with families whose fathers were unable to sit with them and helped manage the children. I supported young people by making an effort to attend special events such as courts

of honor, school plays and concerts, seminary graduations, and Primary talks. I took more interest in the lives of the children I worked with in my career as a speech-language pathologist and offered more encouragement to their parents as they coped with the many challenges of having a child with a disability. I invited children from the ward or neighborhood to

my home to decorate Christmas cookies, watch a movie, or play in my yard. I helped a busy mother by giving her children rides to youth activities or running errands. I tried to fill a few of the voids created by the absence of deployed military parents in our community.

On one occasion, Jonah, whose father was deployed, suffered a severely broken arm. I was able to drive Jonah and his mother to the hospital and then care for his three siblings overnight so their mother could stay with Jonah.

When I talked to Jonah’s mother later, she expressed concern about having “imposed” on me. I could only thank her for giving me an alternative opportunity for motherhood.

While some women live in homes where opportunities for motherhood abound and even overwhelm, I live a life where opportunities for motherhood must be sought. My motherhood is found in serving others. Of course I still am disappointed that I haven’t had the opportunity to raise children of my own, but Heavenly Father has not left me childless. My children are all around me, providing me with precious, though less typical, opportunities for motherhood. ■

For more on this topic, please see the following:

Henry B. Eyring, “Help Them on Their Way Home,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2010, 22–25.

Robert D. Hales, “Our Duty to God: The Mission of Parents and Leaders to the Rising Generation,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2010, 95–98.

Julie B. Beck, “A ‘Mother Heart,’” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2004, 75–77.

Sheri L. Dew, “Are We Not All Mothers?” *Liahona*, Jan. 2002, 112–114; *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 96–98.

NOTE

1. Sheri L. Dew, “Are We Not All Mothers?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 97.