

Celebrate

NURTURING

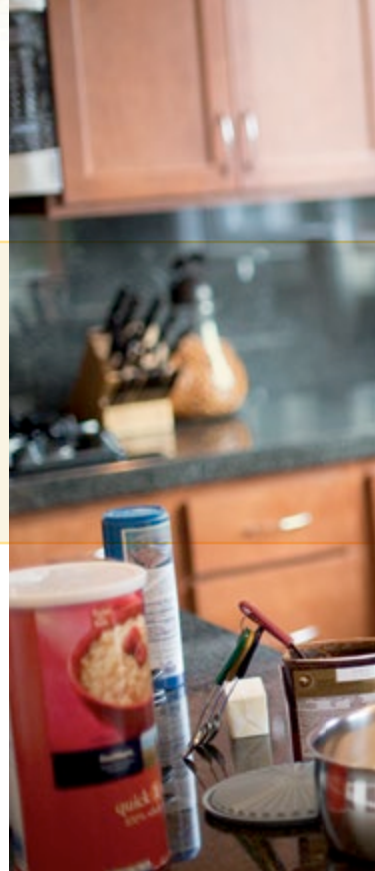
By Rosemary Thackeray

As women, we have many roles we play in our families, our communities, and the Church. In “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” we learn that one of our primary roles is that of being a mother.¹ What are some of the facets of this role?

In most settings, motherhood is discussed in terms of having and rearing children. These children may come into the home by natural childbirth or through the process of adoption or caring for foster children. During talks and lessons in church about the role of being a mother, the discussion often turns to raising children. We discuss holding weekly family home evenings, incorporating daily scripture study into busy schedules, teaching children to pray, preparing children for missions, and more. On these occasions, women will sometimes share frustrations and funny anecdotes about their children’s adventures and antics.

Another facet of being a mother is being a nurturer. Nurturing can be described as acts that foster a good temporal and spiritual climate in which love and learning can thrive. Seen in this light, being a nurturer is not a role exclusive to mothers. Opportunities to nurture are available to everyone, regardless of age or marital status. Personally, I have been blessed with many moments in which I was able to nurture others through my service in Church callings and associations with friends and family. I have also been the recipient of nurturing by women other than my mother.

As a single woman in her 40s who has never given birth to or reared children, I do not pretend to understand the experience of motherhood and the joys, pains, sorrows, and many emotions that accompany that calling. At the same time, it is possible that women who have the privilege of motherhood do not understand the heartache that comes from





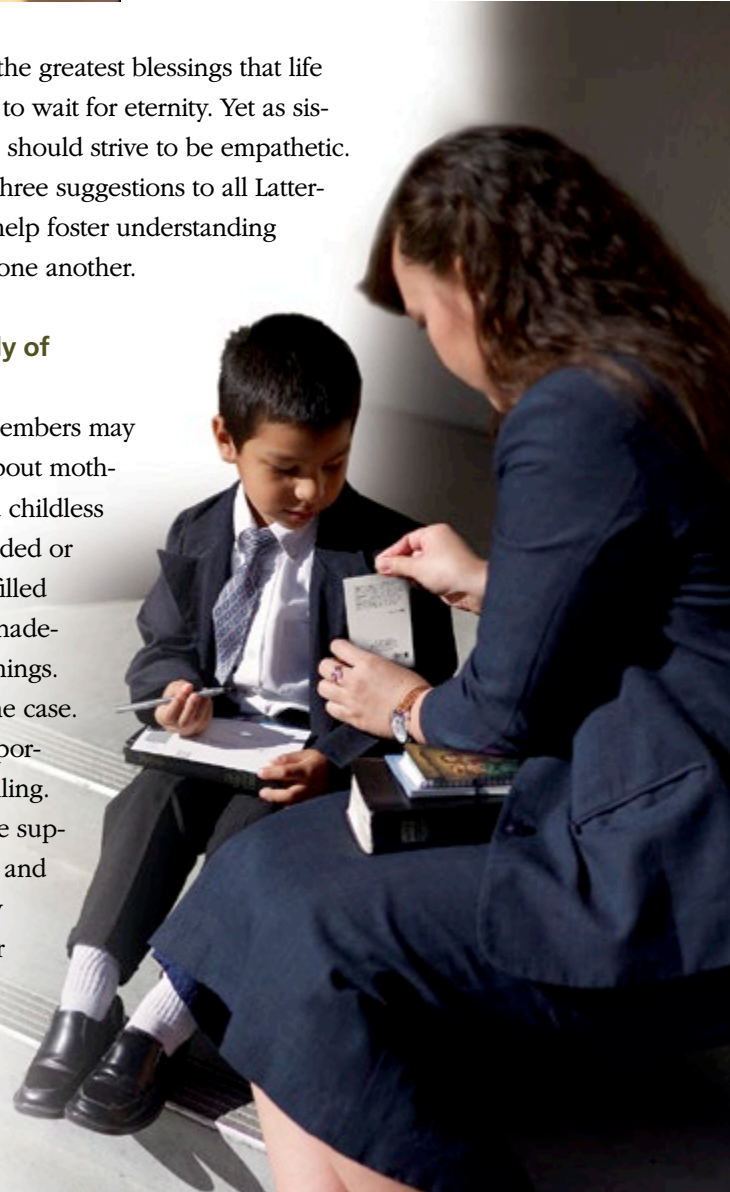
Here are three suggestions to help women understand and relate to one another, whatever their circumstances.



knowing that one of the greatest blessings that life has to offer will have to wait for eternity. Yet as sisters in the gospel, we should strive to be empathetic. I offer the following three suggestions to all Latter-day Saint women to help foster understanding and appreciation for one another.

1. Speak Confidently of Motherhood

At times Church members may be reluctant to talk about motherhood, fearing that a childless woman may be offended or that mothers will be filled with guilt over their inadequacies and shortcomings. That should not be the case. Motherhood is an important, noble, divine calling. Sisters need to receive support, love, validation, and reinforcement as they strive to magnify their calling as mothers.



Maintain confidence when speaking of motherhood, but be aware and sensitive to the situation of the people you are addressing. Perhaps you have heard a teacher or speaker say something to this effect: “For those who do not have children, remember to keep an eternal perspective. One day, despite current circumstances, you will be a mother of numberless children.” While this may be true, it does not begin to fill the void and emptiness a childless woman can feel and may seem to trivialize her feelings. Individuals need not feel obligated to provide advice with the intent to make a person feel better about her situation. It is always best to be led by the Spirit, and sometimes it is best to say nothing.

2. Speak More Often about Nurturing

Nurturing is a behavior that spans a lifetime. You do not need to be a mother to do it—many women have



THE WORD *MOTHER* HAS LAYERS OF MEANING

“When we understand the magnitude of motherhood, it becomes clear why prophets have been so protective of woman’s most sacred role.

While we tend to equate motherhood solely with maternity, in the Lord’s language, the word *mother* has layers of meaning. Of all the words they could have chosen to define her role and her essence, both God the Father and Adam called Eve ‘the mother of all living’ [Moses 4:26]—and they did so *before* she ever bore a child. Like Eve, our motherhood began before we were born. Just as worthy men were foreordained to hold the priesthood in mortality [see Alma 13:2–4, 7–8], righteous women were endowed premortally with the privilege of motherhood [see Spencer W. Kimball, ‘The Role of Righteous Women,’ *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 102]. Motherhood is more than bearing children, though it is certainly that. It is the essence of who we are as women. It defines our very identity, our divine stature and nature, and the unique traits our Father gave us.”

Sheri L. Dew, former second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, “Are We Not All Mothers?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 96.



never given birth but still practice nurtur-

ing. For example, one day I was driving along the shore of the ocean with my 11-year-old niece, Callie, and we saw a wedding ceremony on the beach. We talked about the importance of a temple marriage and how it compared to the beach wedding. This tender moment allowed me to teach Callie and uplifted us both.

As Latter-day Saint women, our collective nurturing efforts contribute to the character development and testimony strengthening of those within our circle of influence. Therefore, we should consider speaking more frequently not only of motherhood but also of nurturing and its impact on our lives. We should celebrate nurturing as often and with as much jubilation as we do motherhood.

3. Expand Your Circle of Sisterhood

People who share common interests tend to gravitate toward each other. Young mothers tend to quickly develop friendships with one another because of their similar situations in life. Sisters who are finished rearing their families may feel that they have nothing in common with those just starting out. And sisters who have never had children also seem to be in their own circle.

However, the fact is that we all need each other. Sister Marjorie Hinckley, wife of President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), said: “Oh, how we need each other. Those of us who are old need you who are young. And, hopefully, you who are young need some of us who are old. It is a sociological fact that women need women. We need deep and satisfying and loyal friendships with each other.”²

Consider inviting sisters in your neighborhood or ward to a social event, lunch, or evening out or to join your



DEVELOPING A “MOTHER HEART”

“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. . . .

“In my experience I have seen that some of the truest mother hearts beat in the breasts of women who will not rear their own children in this life, but they know that ‘all things must come to pass in their time’ and that they ‘are laying the foundation of a great work’ (D&C 64:32–33). As they keep their covenants, they are investing in a grand, prestigious future. . . .

“Covenant-keeping women with mother hearts know that whether motherhood comes early or late; whether

they are blessed with a ‘quiver full’ of children here in mortality or not; whether they are single, married, or left to carry the responsibility of parenthood alone—in holy temples they are ‘endowed with power from on high’ (D&C 38:32), and with that endowment they received the promised blessings and are ‘persuaded of them, and embraced them’ (Hebrews 11:13).

“Every girl and woman who makes and keeps sacred covenants can have a mother heart. There is no limit to what a woman with a mother heart can accomplish. Righteous women have changed the course of history and will continue to do so, and their influence will spread and grow exponentially throughout the eternities.”

Julie B. Beck, former Relief Society general president, “A ‘Mother Heart,’” *Ensign*, May 2004, 76, 77.

GENERAL WOMEN’S MEETING

To read, watch, or listen to addresses from the general women’s meeting held in March 2014, visit conference.lds.org.

family home evening or holiday celebrations. You may be surprised at your shared interests.

For sisters who find themselves in a position where they are nurturers but not yet mothers, acknowledging feelings of sadness is real and normal. Righteous biblical women, including Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elisabeth, felt sorrow in their barrenness. When she finally conceived, Rachel rejoiced, saying, “God hath taken away my reproach” (Genesis 30:23).

The one source of peace and comfort in times of trial comes through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. He has truly “borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). That does not mean that there will not be hard days ahead, especially as you see others enjoy rites of passage associated with motherhood. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles put it this way: “You can have clear faith in the ultimate outcomes at the end of the trail but still find vexing uncertainties in the steps immediately ahead. The Lord knows the end from the beginning and

everything in between. You, however, function in the muddled, mortal middle.”³

All of us can find joy and fulfillment in the “muddled, mortal middle.” As sisters in Zion, we must look for our commonalities, recognize that we are all striving toward the same eternal goal, and realize that we can help each other along the path that includes opportunities for both the mother and the nurturer. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. In Virginia H. Pearce, ed., *Glimpses into the Life and Heart of Marjorie Pay Hinckley* (1999), 254–55.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “These Are Your Days,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2004, 29.

