

The Myth of Invisible Motherhood

*Though we may sometimes feel unseen as mothers,
our faith and efforts are known to our Heavenly Father.*

By Tiffanie Browne

We were at church. My husband was sitting on the stand. I was wrestling with our kids, when the three-year-old escaped to the aisle. I knew the second I stood up she would try to outrace me.

Priesthood holders were gathering to bless a newborn baby. I rushed to the front of the chapel, picked up our three-year-old just in time, and headed to the foyer.

After the blessing, I trekked back in, only to find that the rest of the bench was now full. So, in addition to carrying my three-year-old, I was climbing over five people. I lost my footing and fell into their laps! Then the three-year-old took off the one-year-old's shoes and threw them over my head!

I was mortified. I left that day praying that, somehow, I might get everything under control.

It's Not about You

As I pleaded with the Lord, He brought to my mind a gentle rebuke: "It's not about you." I realized I was looking at the wrong things. I was worried about what others thought of me, not focusing on my relationship with the Savior. Since that day, "It's not about you" has become a phrase I often repeat.

We live in a world that tells us our worth is found in external achievements. It's in our grade point average, our

college degree, how much money we make, or how many likes we got on our last post. It's natural to try to find a measuring stick for success as a mother. But no one hands out medals for juggling carpools, getting laundry done, and making sure kids finish their homework. Yet I continue to do these things. I know that my daily efforts to magnify my calling as a mother bring me closer to Jesus Christ.

When No One Sees

One day, while I was feeling lost in the daily routine of motherhood, I heard a commercial advertising a medication for a skin condition. The slogan was "See me," an appeal to look beyond, to see the person rather than the affliction.

I thought, "That's all I really want—for someone to *see* me." I realized that it is a talent to see the sacrifices others make on our behalf. Most of the people we serve, especially small children, don't understand the sacrifices we make day by day.

I came across an online video called "The Invisible Woman" by Nicole Johnson. Johnson describes how, as a mother, she felt that she was slowly growing invisible. Then a friend gave her a book of photos of great cathedrals. Captions in the book said most of those who helped build the cathedrals are today unknown. Inside the book,



her friend wrote, “With admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees.”¹ Even when we think no one sees or appreciates what we do, God sees.

Family Temple Building

So, what are we building that only God sees? In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord talks about “building houses of worship” (D&C 42:35). I believe parents have the great responsibility to make their homes “houses of worship,” places where the Holy Spirit may abide. “Only the home can compare with the temple in sacredness” (Bible Dictionary, “Temple”).

We may not wake up each morning and think, “Today I am building a temple of God.” But sometimes we try. For example, we might envision an elaborate family home evening where everyone listens and the Spirit is present. Then we hold the *actual* family home evening, complete with cries of “She touched me!” and “Don’t sit by me!” After interruptions and quarrels, everyone ends up in time-out—including Mom!

Here’s the lesson I have learned: We can’t schedule the laying of the cornerstone for our personal temples. It is our daily acts that, over time, lay the bricks that build a temple.

Do You Think I Can Forget?

Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) was seven years old when the Saints were driven from Nauvoo. He watched his mother carry what belongings she could and head for Winter Quarters. “We started to come to Utah in this crude and helpless condition, and my mother said—“The Lord will open the way;’ but how He would open the way no one knew.”²

One morning on their journey, they realized some of their oxen were missing. Joseph and his uncle searched without success. Joseph returned disheartened, soaking wet, and tired. He found his mother praying, pleading with Heavenly Father to help them find their oxen. She finished, then rose and smiled at young Joseph, giving him new hope. Then she went and found the oxen.³

“Do you think I can forget the example of my mother? No; her faith and example will ever be bright in my memory. What do I think! Every breath I breathe, every feeling of my soul rises to God in thankfulness to Him that my mother was a Saint, that she was a woman of God, pure and faithful.”⁴

As you press forward in faith, you testify to your children that Heavenly Father is a God of miracles. Those are the bricks that you lay daily in their temples.

Loaves and Fishes

In Galilee, 5,000 people were following the Savior. He asked His disciples where they might obtain bread to feed them. One of the disciples said a lad had brought five loaves and two fishes. The Lord blessed that food, and it fed 5,000. (See John 6:5–14.)

What does this have to do with motherhood? Think of the boy’s mother, who took time to pack his lunch before she sent him out the door. That’s such a motherly principle! We send them out the door with five loaves and two fishes, hoping it will be enough. Then the Lord blesses those loaves and fishes and produces miracles.

My mother demonstrated this loaves-and-fishes principle when I was in kindergarten. The school was going to hold me back because I couldn’t count unless I used my fingers. Mom made me sit on my fingers so I wouldn’t count on them, but I used them anyway.

Mom hired a math tutor to help me. I learned how to add, but it took a lot of sacrifice, effort, and instruction. I remember Mom telling me over and over again, “You are so good at math.”

In seventh grade, I was placed in a slower math class while others my age were in pre-algebra. That lit a fire in me! I worked hard to get better, and in eighth grade I was allowed to join the others in regular algebra. I was still not the best, but I worked hard, and my mother kept encouraging me.

I eventually graduated with a degree in mathematics, and now I am a math tutor! Initially, all my mother wanted was for me to pass kindergarten. But over time, the Lord

multiplied her efforts to bless my life and now the lives of those I tutor.

The Power of One

Single sisters and women without children can also serve as powerful ambassadors of motherhood. This story was shared by Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“Some days after World War II, my grandmother was standing in line for food when an elderly single sister with no family of her own invited her to sacrament meeting in Zwickau, East Germany. My grandmother and my parents accepted the invitation. They went to church, felt the Spirit, were uplifted by the kindness of the members, and were edified by the hymns of the Restoration. My grandmother, my parents, and my three siblings were all baptized. I had to wait two years because I was only six. How grateful I am for a spiritually sensitive grandmother, teachable parents, and a wise, white-haired, elderly single sister who

had the sweet boldness to reach out and follow the Savior’s example by inviting us to ‘come and see’ (see John 1:39). Her name was Sister Ewig, which translates in English to ‘Sister Eternal.’ I will be eternally grateful for her love and example.”⁵

We never know what impact our everyday acts of kindness may have for others. This sister gave a simple invitation that has blessed the Uchtdorf family for generations.

The Sisterhood of Motherhood

Sisters, I see you walk in faith as you take your young children to church and keep trying to help them learn reverence. I see your faith that one day it will all be worth it. I see faith in single, divorced, or widowed women who do so much on their own.

I see faith in mothers who attend Primary with their special-needs children so their children can participate. I see faith in mothers who pray for inspiration to help a wayward child. And I see faith in weary mothers who nevertheless visit their children’s bedsides to discuss the good and bad of the day, reassuring them that they are seen, heard, and loved.

I see faith in each of you. I see you building places of worship, for yourselves and for others, brick by brick and day by day.

Bravely Building

Sisters, you are brave for what you are building. As you send others out with loaves and fishes, remember to trust the Lord. The most important acts of motherhood may at times go unseen. But the invisibility of motherhood is a myth. We may be doing things that only God can see, but they are the very things that make the greatest difference in our own lives and in the lives of those we love. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See Nicole Johnson, “The Invisible Woman,” YouTube video, youtu.be/9YU0aNAHXP0.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 31.
3. *Teachings: Joseph F. Smith*, 21–22.
4. *Teachings: Joseph F. Smith*, 31.
5. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Opportunity to Testify,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 75.

