

# ONE OF THE FAMILY

By Rachel Neal

As I interact with other young single adults, I've noticed that sometimes it can be easy to be so focused on our marital status that we don't pay attention to those around us. For example, when I first started attending a family ward rather than a young adult ward, I believed I deserved extra attention, pity, and looking after because I was single. I have yet to find an instance when having such an attitude ever did me any good.

During the first year in my ward, I was surprised that many of my other ideas turned out to be myths. I learned that married people can be friends with single people and that I could make a difference in people's lives. Some mothers are overjoyed to have a friend come over for a visit when their husbands are gone for work or Church callings. Parents are often grateful when an adult can provide some individual attention to their children, and most are quite willing to "lend out" their children for movies or other activities.

I also learned that I was not the only person who was single. Other ward members are empty nesters, divorced, or widowed and also struggle to deal with life's issues on their own. And despite my belief that married people are happier, I met some who dealt with depression, job loss, or disabled or wayward children. Those with such struggles always appreciate a listening ear.

But these realizations and friendships did not happen instantly. They took time and effort as I consistently attended my Church meetings, served in callings, and looked for opportunities to help. When my bishop asked me to teach the six-year-olds, I felt inadequate. However, after my first month, several parents thanked me, saying how much their children enjoyed coming to class. To this day some of my closest friends in the ward are family members of those children.

I try to always be available to help others in my ward, but on occasion I have been the one in need of service. Once when

*I thought I might never feel accepted by members of my ward—but I found out I was wrong.*

I needed to paint a room in my home before moving, I was in the middle of final exams and also had to leave town for a wedding. When I mentioned these circumstances to a sister in my ward, she told me she would get some other sisters together to paint the room. Their service saved me lots of time and money.

The members of my ward seem not to define me by my marital status because I don't define myself by it. In conversation I don't bring up my lack of a spouse; instead, I talk about my job, studies, hobbies, and immediate family. By my focusing on these topics, people often see that there is more to me than what is lacking.

A wise friend once told me that friendship is a two-way road; you can't give some without receiving some in return. I realize that all my friendships will never provide me with the same experiences that a spouse and children would, but I also know that Heavenly Father loves all His children. No matter our circumstances in life, it is possible to feel loved and accepted. ■

