

BY STEFFANI R. PACKER

For most children, Christmas is a time of excitement and anticipation. For me, it was also a lesson in economics and math. As the youngest of five children, I feared that someone, somehow, would receive more presents than I would. As the days in December passed, I made it my personal mission to count all of the presents under the tree, ensuring that I had the most gifts, or at least as many as my siblings. When I had the most, I knew that my parents loved me more than anything, and I was convinced that I was their favorite child.

But most of the time, counting presents left me feeling unsatisfied, ungrateful, and upset. Even after Mom showed me from her store receipts that she truly had spent the same amount of money on each of the children, I still felt cheated somehow. In my young mind, the amount of money my mother spent didn't matter—the number of presents did. To me, gift plus gift equaled love.

As I grew, I began applying this equation to my relationship with my Heavenly Father by counting my presents from Him. Whenever I wondered if He loved me, I went through my blessings, keeping a running total in my mind. "Heavenly Father loves me because He has given me . . ." This worked incredibly well for many years. Because I had been blessed in numerous ways, I felt sure I was one of His favorite people. When I got married and had a baby boy, I added two more blessings to my list. My blessings were my measuring stick for Heavenly Father's love.



LEARNING NOT TO COUNT

Then came a problem. I began praying to have another baby. But after three miscarriages, I started feeling unloved. I tried counting my other blessings, but that didn't make me feel any better. Nothing seemed as important as the blessing Heavenly Father was denying me. If He loved me, as I thought my life had proven thus far, why wouldn't He grant me the blessing I so desperately wanted?

At 23, I was still figuratively counting presents under the tree. I began to realize that if Heavenly Father used blessings as His measuring stick for love, He must not love those whose lives were stricken with struggle and pain. Everything in me knew this wasn't true, and yet it was hard to believe He loved me when He wouldn't give me what I longed for.

I needed answers. If my blessings couldn't be the ultimate measuring stick, then what could I use to measure Heavenly Father's love for me?

On a day when I felt Heavenly Father didn't love me at all, my two-year-old son asked me to read to him from our children's Bible storybook. As I read the simple text describing the

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greatest events ever to unfold on this earth, the birth of the Savior and His Atonement, I was reminded of what the Savior went through for me. He was the Son of God, the Only Begotten, and yet on this earth He descended below everything. He looked for "some to take pity, but there was

none; and for comforters, but [He] found none" (Psalm 69:20). Still He followed the Father's will—without indulging in self-pity.

I found my answer: the Savior's sacrifice is the ultimate evidence of Heavenly Father's love. He sent His Son to suffer beyond what any of us can imagine so we can find peace in this world and then return to Him one day. This is love.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1926–2004) said: "When suffering and burdened Jesus entered Gethsemane, He 'fell on the ground' (Mark 14:35). He did not merely kneel down, pray intensely and briefly, and leave. His agonies were so great that He began to bleed at every one of thousands of His pores (see D&C 19:18). An angel, whose identity we do not know, came to strengthen Him (see Luke 22:43). Mark wrote that Jesus became 'sore amazed' and 'very heavy' (Mark 14:33), meaning in the Greek, respectively, 'astonished and awe-struck' and 'depressed and dejected.' None of us can tell Christ anything about depression!"¹

That afternoon I stopped feeling sorry for myself and realized that it wasn't about me but about Him. If I would turn to His Atonement every time I felt thwarted and alone, I would find love. While I recognize that my blessings come from His gracious hand, I knew that if I continued to measure His love by the presence or absence of these blessings, I would never feel secure in "the arms of his love" (see 2 Nephi 1:15).

For years I had been using a measuring stick to quantify Heavenly Father's love for me. Now I know that Heavenly Father's love cannot be measured. Through the gift of our Savior, I learned that the love of Heavenly Father and His Son is infinite. ■

NOTE

1. "Enduring Well," *Ensign*, Apr. 1997, 10.