

Ministering to Members

WHO ARE DIVORCED



We can act as ministering angels to those who are suffering from the heartache of divorce.

By Brian Duncan

Several years ago I was faced with the most trying and difficult event of my life, divorce. Having been married in the temple, I had believed that my marriage would be eternal. But life doesn't always go as planned.

Divorce can be devastating, and unfortunately, as the adversary continues to wage war on marriage and families, divorce is likely to remain a challenge we face, even within the Church. The incidence of divorce among those who have been married in the temple should merit our collective concern. It should also prompt us to consider the needs and concerns of our brothers and sisters in the Church who have been divorced as we continue to minister to them.

Common Feelings and Fears

Many covenant-keeping men and women in our midst forge ahead despite hearts that have been broken and dreams that have been shattered. Many yearn to be useful and needed. All of them need the Savior's atoning power to "bind up the brokenhearted, . . . to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:1, 3).

But the road is daunting even for the most committed of Saints. As one researcher found, "Divorced Latter-day Saints have lower religious participation than married members. They attend Church less often, and they pray, pay tithing, and hold Church callings less frequently than married members. These may be symptomatic of both the causes and the consequences of divorce."¹

The emotions of a broken marriage are complex and painful. Divorcees may feel they are barely surviving, both emotionally and financially. Joy can seem impossible to imagine. Parents as well as children

suffer grief, anger, resentment, guilt, fear, loneliness, and loss. Many fear being labeled, judged, and, worst of all, ignored by Church leaders and peers. They may become shy or withdrawn; they may become resentful and bitter.

As a divorced man in the Church, I have had many of these feelings. But as I prayed diligently for help, I found that the Lord sent various people to minister to me and my children. Because of my experiences, I believe that as ward members and fellow Saints we may be given opportunities to act as a ministering angel to someone near to us. Here are some of the experiences when such "ministering angels" helped me and my family along the way.

The Relief Society, the Bishop, and Service

As a single parent, I found myself suddenly in charge of all the family needs. While working a full-time job, I also had to shop, clean the house, do the laundry, cook meals, mow the lawn, take children to and from school, attend their sports and Church activities, and more. Personal free time became a forgotten luxury; I wanted to have enough time and presence of heart to help my children with schoolwork and to nurture them in the gospel, but I didn't have the time and energy to do it all. I felt overwhelmed.



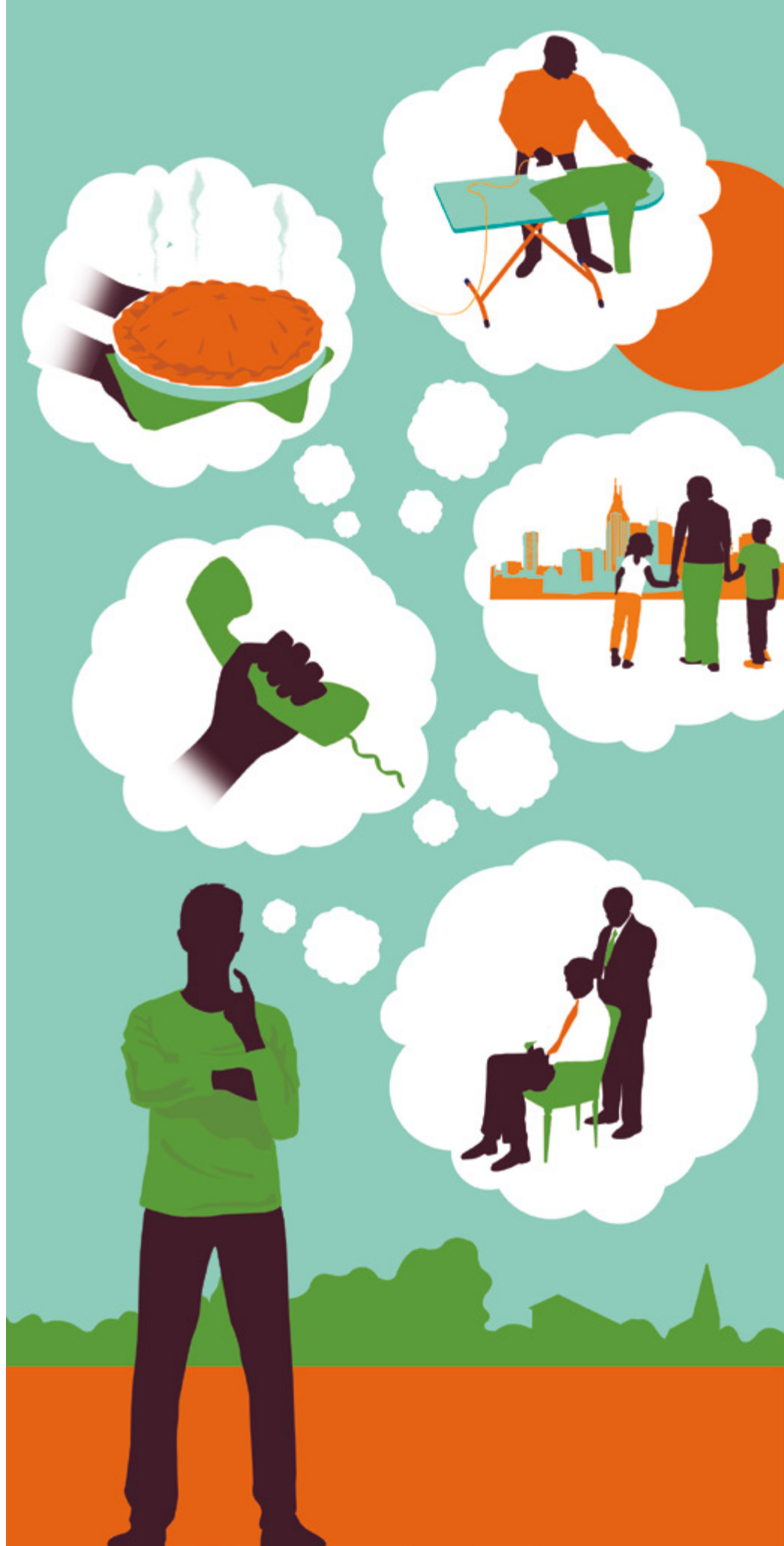
Because I'm not a member of the Relief Society, I was afraid to ask for their help. But kind sisters and neighbors offered relief anyway. For example, when I was busy at work and couldn't get to the school in time to pick up my children, these kind women would pick them up for me. They invited my children to their homes to play so that I could run errands or do much-needed housework. I am still grateful for their nurturing influence when my children were under their care.

My bishop would answer my phone calls day or night. He followed the spirit of discernment. Whenever I needed guidance, a priesthood blessing, or just a safe place to talk, he was there. I appreciated his leadership and understanding. He helped me to keep my eyes on the Savior during my darkest hours.

I was blessed with meaningful callings from my bishopric during and after my divorce. My callings were given to me with love and trust. This gave me confidence. It helped me to be consistent in my church attendance and to focus on others through service.

Family and Friends

Close friends, ward members, and family offered their faith and prayers on behalf of me and my family. I was so grateful for an occasional kind word. One family member put our names on the temple prayer roll.



On one particularly difficult Sunday, I was feeling invisible and unimportant. I felt that I didn't belong in a ward with so many "normal" families. So as soon as I led my children to their Primary classes, I found myself walking toward the exit. I didn't know where I would go; I just wanted to disappear.

But before I could slip away, a kind brother in my ward put his arm around me. He told me that he was impressed with me and praised my diligence in bringing my kids to church every week. I was so grateful for his kindness. His fellowship came at a crucial moment and he gave me courage to endure.

Our home teacher was a genuine friend to me and to my children. He knew that I was alone and suffering, and he would text me and call me often. When he and his companion would visit, I knew that he loved me and my children. He was a tall man, and as he taught his inspired messages, he would get on his knees to look my children in the eye. He asked genuine questions and he remembered the details. He told them Jesus loved them. He was a disciple of Christ.

The young men of my ward visited me one evening as part of a missionary preparation activity. My children were gone that night and the house was uncomfortably quiet and empty. I was so glad to have visitors. These cheerful Aaronic Priesthood holders were simply fulfilling their duty to "watch

over the church" (D&C 20:53), but they gave me companionship and helped lighten my burden.

On one cold December night, our doorbell rang. My children answered the door to find a collection of small gifts. An anonymous giver had selected us to receive gifts for the 12 days leading up to Christmas. We eagerly looked forward to their secret visit every night as Christmas drew near. I will never forget the joy my children and I received that Christmas season because of someone else's thoughtfulness.

Finding the Light

Many times I felt hopeless and fearful on my journey through a dark tunnel. But I can testify that there is light, not just at the end of the tunnel, but all along the way. The Lord is that light! He stands with open arms to comfort, heal, forgive, and deliver us from every source of anguish. He sends the Holy Ghost and ministering angels to help those who suffer. There are opportunities for each of us to act as angels for those around us—"to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:9).

Divorce is a source of mourning for many of our Latter-day Saint brothers and sisters. It can feel like the death of certain hopes and dreams that they held dear. It is a trial of disappointment and loneliness. But the Lord has condescended below all things and He heals the heavy laden. Through His infinite Atonement, He gives peace and rest. As President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has taught, "All who have been through divorce know the pain and need the healing power and hope that come from the Atonement."²

May we all take notice of those weary travelers in our path who need our friendship, love, and understanding. No matter who we are, we all can minister to those around us. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Kristen L. Goodman, "Divorce," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), 1:392; see also Josh Lockhart, "Survey Reveals What It's Really Like to Be Divorced in the LDS Church," *LDS Living*, May 16, 2016, ldsiving.com.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, "Divorce," *Ensign*, May 2007, 71.

