



WE ARE STILL YOUR Brothers

I learned through personal experience that the Lord is aware of the challenges faced by single fathers in the Church.

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As is the case for me on many nights, I went to sleep that Friday night exhausted. After a particularly challenging 10-hour day at work, I had come home to fix dinner, drive my daughter to a junior high school activity, do three batches of laundry, go shopping, put the groceries away, pick up my daughter, give up (for lack of time) on going to my mission reunion, do the dishes, pay some bills, and, as I was going to bed about midnight, receive an email from a family member asking me if I was dating anyone yet.

I chuckled. “Like I have time to date,” I thought.

Years of Challenge

I have spent many years as a single father, caring for five children as they have grown. That particular night, as on many other nights, I felt so alone, so overwhelmed. I wondered how on earth I could continue to cope.

After reading my scriptures, I prayed for strength to continue one more day. Knowing general conference began the next day, I asked, as I always do, to receive guidance particularly suited to me. “Heavenly Father,” I pleaded, “help me to know that someone understands the challenges of single fathers in the Church.”

Saturday Afternoon

My answer came on Saturday afternoon. Elder David S. Baxter of the Seventy gave a message to single parents, and as he spoke, I knew that Heavenly Father was using Elder Baxter to speak to me: “Now, there are, of course, some single families where it is the father who is the single parent. Brethren, we also pray for you and pay tribute to you. This message is also for you.”¹

I sat in my chair and cried. Someone did understand. Most important of all, the Lord understood. And not only had I received an unmistakable answer to my prayer, but I also found myself reliving memory after memory of blessings, strength, and comfort I had received through the years as a single father in the Church.

Blessed by the Sisters

The first image that came to my mind was of our ward’s Relief Society sisters—not just one image but a succession of them. I saw the sisters, when my wife was dying, bringing meals and cleaning floors and visiting with my children. I remembered how later on they offered to make photo scrapbooks with my daughters, to teach them to sew and cook, to include them and their brothers in school car pools and take them on errands while I was at work.



A FAITHFUL FATHER

Watch the story of a faithful single father raising two teenage sons at mormon.org/me/1frq.

I particularly remembered one Relief Society president altering the sleeve size on my son's football uniform.

I saw Primary leaders and Young Women leaders who, knowing there was not a mother in our home, watched over my daughters, counseling them about how to select a dress or do their hair for school dances, filling their lives with guidance that I, as a father, could only awkwardly provide. And I saw the young women of the ward simply taking time to laugh and joke and help my daughters to feel normal.

As a single father, I have been grateful time and again for sisters whose “charity never faileth” (1 Corinthians 13:8; see also Moroni 7:46).

And the Brothers, Too

Next I saw a succession of priesthood brethren—leaders, friends, neighbors, and especially home teachers. I sensed that they had prayed for me and about me, that in councils they had talked about my family and our needs in a sincere desire to serve us as the Savior would serve.

I remembered testimonies borne of the plan of salvation, invitations to come to the temple, and high priests group and Sunday School discussions conducted with sensitivity toward those without spouses. I remembered a kind bishop who assigned me to home teach with my sons so that I could spend more time with them and a stake president who reassured me that I was “handling things just right.” I thought of times when I came home to find my lawn had been mowed or my driveway shoveled. And I cried again as I thought of a less-active brother who, even

though he had been working all night, came to my rescue when my car conked out several miles from home.

Did someone understand the challenges of the single fathers of the Church? Obviously the Lord did, and His reminder about all the help that He had sent my way humbled me.

Since That Day

Since that day, I have read and re-read Elder Baxter's address and tried to live by the counsel it provides. Here are some principles that have become particularly meaningful to me.²

Live within the framework of the gospel.

There are no exceptions to the law of obedience, even when you are lonely, tired, and desperate for support. “Bless you for avoiding the type of companionship that would come at the expense of virtue and discipleship. That would be far too high a price to pay.”

Be faithful. Say your prayers. Read your scriptures. Attend your meetings.

Look to the future with confidence. “While you cannot change the past, you can shape the future.” Strive to raise your children in righteousness and truth, knowing that their achievements will stand as a tribute to you. Along the way, you will receive blessings, even if they aren't apparent at first. Prepare to enjoy the blessings of being part of a complete, eternal family.

Find yourself through service. “When you live to lift the burdens of others, your own burdens become lighter. Although circumstances may not have changed, your attitude has. You are able to face your own trials with greater acceptance, a more understanding heart, and deeper gratitude for what you have, rather than pining for what you yet lack.”



Trust in the Lord. “Although you often feel alone, in truth you are never *totally* on your own. . . . Your perspective and view of life will change when, rather than being cast down, you look up. . . . As you do your very best in the most difficult of human challenges, heaven will smile upon you. . . . Let the redemptive, loving power of Jesus Christ brighten your life now and fill you with the hope of eternal promise.”

No Second-Class Citizens

I also found great comfort in this statement from Elder Baxter: “Please never feel that you are in some kind of second-tier subcategory of Church membership, somehow less entitled to the Lord’s blessings than others. In the kingdom of God there are no second-class citizens.”

A recent report indicates that in the United States, roughly one in twelve households with minor children is headed by a single father, the highest number in history. “When people talk about single parents, the fact is it’s usually code for single mothers,” says a senior researcher. “It’s important to recognize that there’s a pretty significant minority of those parents who are dads.”³

As the Church continues to grow, it will also include more and more single parents, among them single fathers. My appeal to single parents is, remember that others do understand that you face challenges in running a home and raising a family on your own. Especially remember that Heavenly Father loves you. Remain faithful and He will bless you. And my appeal to all Latter-day Saints is, remember that single fathers are still your brothers. Whether we are single because we never married, are divorced, or are widowed, we are eager to join with you in living the gospel and building the kingdom of God. ■

NOTES

1. David S. Baxter, “Faith, Fortitude, Fulfillment: A Message to Single Parents,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 39.
2. Except where noted, all quotations in the remainder of the article are from David S. Baxter, “Faith, Fortitude, Fulfillment,” 37–39.
3. Gretchen Livingston, in Lois M. Collins, “1 in 12 Households Headed by Single Dad, Pew Study Finds,” *Deseret News*, July 4, 2013, deseretnews.com/article/865582639/1-in-12-households-headed-by-single-dad-Pew-study-finds.html.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

What sort of service truly helps single fathers?

As a single father, I have learned that my fellow Saints want to help me but that they sometimes struggle to know what to do. Here are some observations and suggestions based on my own experience.

Sisters provide invaluable service. In the same way that the priesthood watches over children without a father in the home, sister Saints can watch over children who don’t have a mother in the home.

Meet true needs. Not all men are mechanically inclined; I was relieved when a neighbor helped me repair a broken pipe. On the other hand, I love to cook and don’t need lots of tips about preparing nutritious meals for my children.

Suggest specific ways you’d like to help. Saying, “Let me know if I can do something” puts the burden on me. Asking, “Could we haul away those branches you trimmed?” enables me to respond.

Offer to stay with my children for a few hours. Single parents need time to replenish their energy to be more effective fathers or mothers.

The way reassurance is given makes a difference. Just listening may be the greatest support you can provide. And a simple word of welcome or thanks may lift someone’s spirit more than a lot of advice, especially advice about dating.

Invite me to everything, but understand the demands on my time. Allow me to continue to participate and serve, but remember I have to balance responsibilities normally shared by two.

Long-term support is important. Don’t assume that as time passes, needs disappear. I’m pleased when home teachers check on progress.