
Could I Feel Fulfilled as a Mother?

By *Jennifer West*

Before the birth of my first child, I had an enjoyable, challenging career. I wondered if I could be happy staying at home.

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"Children are an heritage of the Lord" (**Ps. 127:3**). Since the births of my two young children, I have had many reasons to reflect on the meaning of that scripture.

Before my first child was born, I enjoyed my job as a social worker and worried that I would not feel as fulfilled if I stayed at home as a full-time mother. After Jacob was born, my fears seemed to be coming true. When he was several months old, the newness and excitement of being a mother had worn off, and I was feeling lonely and discouraged. I missed the everyday association with coworkers, the gratification of knowing I was making a difference in the world, and the recognition of a job well done. Most of all, I missed the feeling of accomplishment that came when I completed a seemingly insurmountable task. I was grateful my husband's income allowed me to stay at home—and I knew I was making a difference in my son's life—but making sure Jacob had a clean diaper or that his tummy was full did not leave me with the same sense of fulfillment.

One day I happened to read a copy of "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" that was hanging in our hallway, and I noticed the following passage: "Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102). It hit me that there is no job more challenging than the one just described and that I needed to treat it as such. I decided to begin by further researching the topic, just as I had always done when clients had issues I was less familiar with.

As I read and pondered the words of our prophets concerning this subject, I began to realize I had been focusing mostly on the mundane activities of running a household and had forgotten the sacredness of my calling as a mother. I read the words of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who spoke of **motherhood** as a "grand tradition":

"Yours is the grand tradition of Eve, the mother of all the human family. ... Yours is the grand tradition of Sarah and Rebekah and Rachel, without whom there could not have been those magnificent patriarchal promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which bless us all. Yours is the grand tradition of Lois and Eunice and the mothers of the 2,000 stripling warriors. Yours is the grand tradition of Mary, chosen and foreordained from before this world was, to conceive, carry, and bear the Son of God himself" (" 'Because She Is a Mother,' " *Ensign*, May 1997, 36).

I realized that I too have the potential to raise righteous leaders, but to catch this higher vision I needed to look beyond the mundane. I tried to tackle my new responsibilities with as much

enthusiasm and effort as I did my previous career. That doesn't mean I was enthusiastic about changing my baby's diaper or that I found fulfillment in doing laundry, but I found ways to personalize and get more satisfaction out of my new job.

I decided to make better use of my talents to bless my family's life and at the same time make my day more enjoyable. My own mother had been a good example of this as she had shared her love for art with us. She held "art days" where we watched her create new drawings or attempted our own masterpieces. As a result, many of my siblings became talented artists. In the same way, I could use my own talents and interests to benefit my children. For example, I could influence them to love literature as I do by regularly reading aloud to them. I could help them share my love for the outdoors by frequently taking them on walks or on expeditions to the park. And as I turned my attention to my family, I didn't need to leave behind what I learned from my profession. I could continue to apply the principles of child development I learned as a social worker in the raising of my children.

Since then, I have realized that the rewards I have received as a mother far outweigh any recognition or bonus I received at my previous job. For example, I recall the time I watched Jacob first discover his hands. He had stared in wonder as he rotated them before his face for what seemed like hours. I was caught by surprise at the indescribable feeling of joy that filled my heart as I wiped the tears from my eyes. Never had I been as emotional over a client's accomplishment as I was at his simple discovery.

Then there was the evening when Jacob, still a newborn, had stared up into my eyes and it felt as if we were communicating something sacred. He had looked at me with such intensity that I wondered if I was catching a glimpse of the spiritual man harbored in his little body. My heart filled with love, and I felt humbled to be entrusted with one of Heavenly Father's precious spirits.

I am coming to understand the significance of President Gordon B. Hinckley's words: "Of all the joys of life, none other equals that of happy parenthood. Of all the responsibilities with which we struggle, none other is so serious. To rear children in an atmosphere of love, security, and faith is the most rewarding of all challenges. The good result from such efforts becomes life's most satisfying compensation" ("Save the Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 54).

I still experience times of discouragement and restlessness, but I know there are ways to meet these challenges. I find comfort in the knowledge that I am participating in a sacred work unsurpassed by any other—that of being a mother.