

Forget the Former Things



Are you finding it difficult to parent your children by yourself? If you are adjusting to being divorced and have surpassed the shock and numbing phase of your divorce, this article can help you move forward in your life.

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

Isaiah 43:18–19 says, “*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.*”

This Scripture is a vision for every single parent. Let us forget what brought you to this point of being a single parent and concentrate on what God has in store for you. (It is also a vision for churches interested in ministering to the single parent, the children from single parent families and the entire church family.) God is doing a new thing for single parent families and also for the churches that welcome them. God is creating, or should we say re-creating, the first church that the New Testament talks about—a church that’s religion is pure and faultless, a church that reaches out to the husbandless, the fatherless and the motherless. Did you know that includes you the single parent and your children? It doesn’t make any difference the reason you are a single parent family. The point is you are a single parent family.

Rebuilding After Brokenness

When I became a single parent after my divorce, I felt like the exiles Nehemiah talks about in the first chapter of the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah 1:3 says: “*Those who*

survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

As I began to heal from the loss of my intact family, I felt as though my life was a disgrace and everything had gone up in smoke. My wall—my family, like the wall of Jerusalem—was broken down, my gates were destroyed. I had not believed in divorce; I didn’t want a divorce; and yet I was divorced with two children. As I prayed, God began to help me realize that I was not the only one who is in this situation. I began to realize that the walls are today’s families, and these families are being destroyed. We have many broken and dysfunctional families. Yet who better to rebuild these families than God’s family, the church?

Nehemiah 3:28 says the Jews rebuilt the walls to the right of, in front of and at an angle to their houses. These people didn’t sit around and moan and groan. Nehemiah told them to get up and get busy, and they did. I began to wonder, *What if the Lord would use me in my situation to help other single parents? What if the church would take an active role in developing Single Parent Family ministries? What if the Lord wanted me to bring His Word to churches?* Whoa! That was a frightening thought! But still, what if I could

be useful in my brokenness? Hmm, I would have to think and pray about this.

Behold, He Is Doing a New Thing

As I prayed, the Lord began to reveal to me that if I took my mind off my own situation and worked through and with Him, then maybe, just maybe, I would feel better about my life. It didn't happen overnight. It took time to really comprehend what being a single parent was all about. I had to get over the hurt and the feeling of rejection. At first I thought I had to go out and date and find someone to marry. I was sure I couldn't parent my kids alone. And what about my needs? Didn't I deserve to have my needs met? I realized I had to calm down and turn to God. He was the only One who could meet my needs. He was the only One who could help me parent my hurting children. He revealed to me that if I married right away, it might work out for me, but it wouldn't work for my children. They needed time to grieve the loss of their family. I had only lost a mate, but they had lost a family. I concentrated on the fact that the Lord had something else in store for me: "See I'm doing a new thing . . . do you not perceive it?"

You Are Not Alone

I want to share with you some statistics and information I came across. Maybe it will help you to understand you are not alone. Not only is God with you, but there are many single parents out there. Possibly it will help you take your mind off your situation. Perhaps the Lord will use you to enlighten others in His family.

The majority of the following information is adapted from the book, *The Hidden Mission Field* by Theresa McKenna (Winepress Publishing, 1999).

Do you realize that today almost 60% of all children will at some point in their first 18 years of life end up in a single parent family?

Do you know that every year over a million children will experience the divorce of their parents?

Do you know that in some states that one out of every four children tonight will go to bed in a single parent family? (That doesn't count the children who were in a single parent family but are now in a blending family.)

* 35% of children in a single parent family live in a divorced home.

* 40% of children are from never-married situations.

* 5% come from families where one parent has died.

* 17% are from people who are married but parenting alone due to incarceration, mental health issues and substance abuse or a deserted parent. (Yet most churches that have any type of single parent ministry only include the children from the divorced or "broken home." What about the other 65%?)

Do you realize that 95% of divorced people remarry, and 70% of them have children? Do you know that the two main reasons cited for remarriage of people with children are (1) they need financial help to raise their children, and (2) they need someone to help them parent their children.

Are you aware that most of these marriages will end in divorce? The two reasons cited for remarriage in families with children are the same reasons the marriage fails. (Be aware and don't become another statistic.)

What if your church could step in and teach you and other single parents how to parent alone and even assist with some of the parenting? Do you understand that research

shows that you parent the way you were parented? If you were parented in a two-parent home, then you may need some help parenting alone.

What if your church were to help financially instead of abdicating this responsibility to the government or other civic groups? And what if when the church helped, they allowed you, the single parent, to maintain your dignity? Most single parents want to pay their own way; they don't want handouts or someone feeling sorry for them. I had to learn to swallow my pride and accept help. Once when my son was rushed to the emergency room, my church friends stepped up to help. My son had to have emergency surgery, and I ended up spending the night with him in the hospital. I sat there all night trying to figure out how I was going to manage to buy food after paying the deductible for this surgery.

Early the next morning I snuck out of the hospital and rushed home to clean up and change clothes. I was sleepy and very hungry. Who can sleep on those hard sofas, and who carries around the cash to plug into vending machines in the middle of the night? I walked into my house and mindlessly opened the fridge. I was surprised to find it stocked to the brim with food. I yanked open the cupboard, and it was not bare. It was full of food that I could take with me to the hospital. My church family stepped up. I stood there crying and praising the Lord. I graciously accepted their help.

Do you realize that only 5% of single parents attend church, while 35% of two-parent families attend church? I want to encourage you to keep attending church. You need the Lord's family; they need you; and your children need to feel like they belong to God's family. Even if your kids only get to go every other week, take them on the week they

are with you. Your faithfulness will pay off as your children grow and mature.

Maybe you have not read the research that "children from committed, single parent families can and do perform as well as children from committed, intact families. The critical element in their success is the evidence of life skill competency on the part of the primary caregiver, plus the love, support, control and supervision typically associated with traditional family structure" (*The Hidden Mission Field* by Theresa McKenna, p. 51). My children are now grown. They are mature Christian adults contributing to our society in meaningful ways. They are successful as adults, in their marriages and as parents.

Successful Single Parent Families

Possibly you haven't taken the time to look at the successful single parent families in your community? You know, the single parent family where the child graduates with high grades or is on the football team or a topnotch band player? Or, how about the family where the child has to miss Sunday night choir because he has to work to earn money not only for his college but to help support his single mother? Look around and find those people. Ask them to mentor you as you parent alone. Parent with God, and use the stories in His Word to help you parent your children. God is always there.

As you grow in strength and knowledge, go to your church and take your experiences with you. Tell them what God is doing in your life. Be positive and ask them to allow you to serve. Ask them to use you to help others in similar situations.

And constantly remember the Scripture that we started with:

Isaiah 43:18–19: *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”*

A way in the desert and streams in the wasteland . . . for you, the single parent.

Today the Lord is still using me in some incredible ways. He allows me to speak to single parents, to write articles for single parents and to speak on behalf of single parents to churches. I stand back in awe at where I’ve come from. I made many mistakes along the way, but God is a forgiving and gracious God. He loved me through. He will love you through also.

© MMV by the author and/or Church Initiative. All rights reserved. Reproducible only when used with a Church Initiative ministry program.

Linda Ranson Jacobs is the DC4K creator and developer. For more information, email info@dc4k.org. To discover more about DivorceCare for Kids or to find a DC4K group near you, go to www.dc4k.org.