



# Embracing Spiritual Motherhood

By **SUZY GRUMELOT**

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## The Awkward Moment

**O**n more than one occasion, I've found myself with brothers and sisters in Christ in a moment that became...awkward. I'm a never-married single woman serving in cross-cultural ministry. My singleness is not the path that I would have chosen, but it is part of God's plan for me (for now) and it comes with many blessings and challenges. One significant challenge is that it has meant being childless, even though years ago one of my high school friends imagined me as the "most likely to be a mom" in our group.

But back to the awkward moments. I've been at gatherings where a complete stranger has come up to

Note, all Scripture references are NLT.

me and asked, "So how many children do you have?" I remember the first time it happened just hanging my head and saying, "Oh, I'm not married, and I don't have any children," and suddenly I felt bad and she did too. As a result, the conversation went nowhere. This scenario didn't happen once; or even just twice in my ministry life, it has happened multiple times. Sometimes the question was a bit different, "So which one is your husband?" But the result was always the same. Whatever the question, it invariably pointed to my own ache and the desires that God, in His wisdom, had decided were not for me, at least for now. But my answers left us both feeling awkward.

In recent years, I've been delighted to see much more clearly the scriptural point of view on the big

idea of *spiritual family*. Now I can revel in how God sees both marriage and singleness and our sacred sibling relationships, as brothers and sisters in Christ. The place and value of spiritual motherhood and fatherhood make sense. Have you ever wondered about the passage in Isaiah 54, *Sing O childless woman! Break forth into loud and joyful song...for the woman who could bear no children now has more than all the other women, says the Lord*. What does that mean? How can a childless woman become a mother of many? The passage goes on to say this particular woman doesn't have a husband either, so her hopes of ever having her own children are nil. Interestingly, just two chapters later the blessing is extended beyond the barren woman:

*And my blessings are for Gentiles, too, when they accept the Lord; don't let them think that I will make them second-class citizens. And this is for the eunuchs too. They can be as much mine as anyone. <sup>4</sup>For I say this to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths holy, who choose the things that please me and obey my laws: <sup>5</sup>I will give them—in my house, within my walls—a name far greater than the honor they would receive from having sons and daughters. For the name that I will give them is an everlasting one; it will never disappear (Isa. 56:3–5).*

As I dug into these truths even more (with the help of theologian friends), I came to see several connections in the biblical narrative. Have you ever noticed the marital and parental statuses of the Old Testament prophets? And how does the theology of offspring invite us to consider the one and the many, the physical and the spiritual? Does that somewhat obscure verse Isaiah 53:10 catch our attention?

*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring.*

How can this be? This is a picture of Jesus on the cross. We know He had no physical children. Yet in that moment when He makes his offering for sin, He sees His offspring. What kind of children are these? Spiritual ones! Us! Have you ever noticed what *be fruitful and multiply* gets replaced with in the New Testament? *Hint: think Great Commission!* This is the great equalizer. All of us, married, single, with or without physical children have the same mandate:

*Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this—that I am with you always, even to the end of the world (Matt. 28:18-20).*

***Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!***  
(Matt. 12:48, 50)

And who does Jesus say is His family? *Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!* (Matt. 12:48, 50). All these themes in scripture have helped me to embrace this big and beautiful idea of what God is about in redeeming His people and putting them into a spiritual family. And it gives me a place to see myself as a nurturer and lover of people, inviting them into my heart and home. That's what discipleship looks like. And this big beautiful spiritual family is such a compelling and attractive place to invite the world, who are without Jesus, into. When we live this out well, it helps us reach the lost in any culture, tribe, and nation.

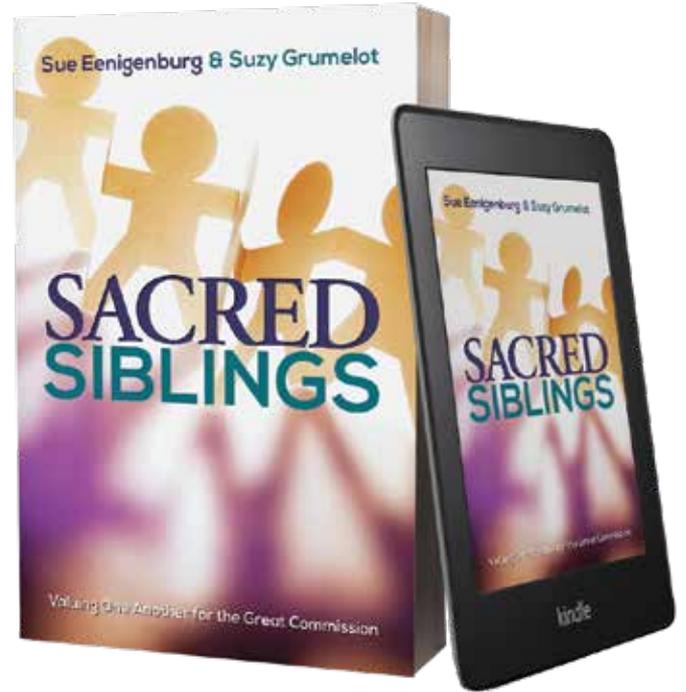
## Changing the Conversation

So back to the awkward moments. How do we help to change the conversation? A dear friend who is an artist informed my thinking on this. I once remarked to him, "I'm not creative." Now I'm sure he could have waxed long and eloquently on the core theology behind why that wasn't true and talked about our various acts of worship and our creative God. But instead, he responded with a sad little smile and simply quipped, "Oh, how can that be, when you're created in His image?" And then he turned and walked away. As I stood there puzzling over his words, I didn't feel judged, or misunderstood, or shamed, or dismissed. His question merely planted a seed that piqued my curiosity and eventually led me to see that my definition of creativity was woefully inadequate.

*I am a spiritual mother and sister to many! Imagine if the worldwide sisterhood of Christ understood this deeply and lived this out, nurturing other men and women into the kingdom.*

Over time, I came to realize that I'm wonderfully creative too, even though I can't draw a straight line, paint a beautiful scene, or write poetry. So, taking a page out of his book, the next time someone asked me the *awkward* question (and yes, this *did* happen yet again) "How many children do you have?" I responded differently. Instead, I decided to plant a seed by referring to what I knew was true. "Actually, I don't have any physical children, but I'd love to tell you about my spiritual children someday." There was a pregnant pause, then the lady laughed and answered, "Oh, I never thought of it that way, I would love to hear more!" Neither of us felt awkward, just curious, and the invitation to go deeper and love well was there. And I later realized that my high school friend was right after all! I *am* a spiritual mother and sister to many! Imagine if the worldwide sisterhood of Christ understood this deeply and lived this out, nurturing other men and women into the kingdom. Perhaps it would be a new women's movement in the making. How I long to see the Church repurpose Mother's Day and Father's Day. Don't get me wrong! It is good to honor our physical mothers and fathers, but even the world does that. However, this is the perfect time—a great teachable moment—to remind us of our mandate and celebrate the fact that every Christian woman on the planet is called to be a spiritual mother, and every Christian man on the planet is called to be a spiritual father. Surely, we can all celebrate that! 

## LEARN MORE



*Ministry team relationships are especially susceptible to the bruises and pains of "missing one another" when assumptions are made about others or expectations go unmet from the team. Suzy and Sue provide us with a framework for slowly addressing relational necessities.*

DAVID RIDDELL

International director, World Team

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