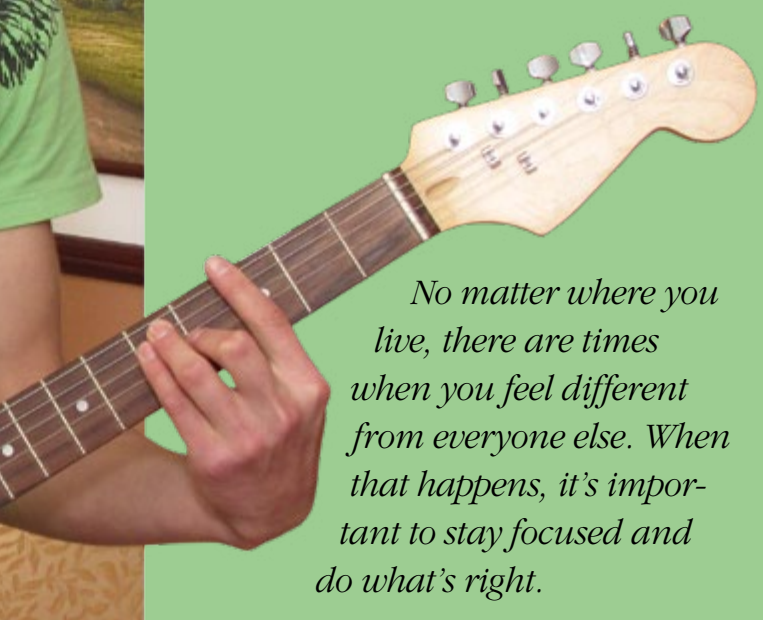


# ALONE BUT **NOT ALONE**

By **Joshua J. Perkey**  
Church Magazines



*No matter where you live, there are times when you feel different from everyone else. When that happens, it's important to stay focused and do what's right.*

**J**uan C., an 18-year-old from Cuenca, Ecuador, knows what it's like to be different. He's one of only a handful of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a city of around 500,000 people, and the pressures to give in to temptation are pretty high. But Juan knows that there is a source of strength greater than any temptation.



## Developing Focus

Juan's parents taught him as a child to follow standards that bless his life. These helped him grow and develop his talents. "Since I was little, I set goals in Primary and Young Men to learn instruments," he explains. "I play the violin, flute, piano, and now the guitar. I like the guitar most of all."

Juan also set personal fitness goals based on *Fulfilling My Duty to God*. Over the years he has studied taekwon do, swimming, and gymnastics, and he was even on his school's running team.

"I love to learn. That's why I always took the challenge to learn a new instrument or sport, to learn something more," he says.

These goals also supported a larger objective. "Everything I've done, all that I have studied, all the physical preparation, all the goals I've set—everything has been with the object of going on a mission," he explains. "And going on a mission is just part of another goal: to be sealed in the temple and become a good husband."

## Learning to Say No

Even with such deep focus, Juan knows that it's not easy to stay on target. A few years ago he gained a lot of strength from older young men in his ward. But most of them have moved or have started attending elders quorum, leaving Juan with

few Church friends to support him when things got hard. During those times, Juan sought strength from his parents and siblings—and from his Heavenly Father.

"You feel a little alone sometimes because you have different standards, a different way of living, of treating other people, of seeking different things in life. But the truth is," Juan adds confidently, "you are never alone. We always have prayer, and we can always draw closer to our Heavenly Father. I have always prayed to have the strength to do what's right, to have the courage to stand up to my friends when they do things that aren't right.

"And you know what?" he continues. "Sometimes my friends have told me they admire my example and the strength I have to say no."

## Standing Firm

Some of the temptations that Juan faced were easy to reject. He could easily say no when a friend would invite him to drink alcohol. That was a clear violation of the commandments.

"But there are times when the temptations are more subtle," Juan explains. "As it says in the scriptures, sometimes it's disguised [see Matthew 7:15]. The temptations can appear as though they are nothing bad because they don't appear to break a specific commandment. That's when you have to pray to be aware of what's going

on so that you don't get confused. The Spirit has helped me understand this many times when something is wrong or when people are trying to get me to do bad things."

As Juan prepares for his mission, he has made some new friends in the Church who support him.

"I'm an example for other youth now, and this has been a blessing for me," he says. "It helps me understand that the effort to be strong, to be faithful, is worth it." **NE**



**Top: Juan with his family. Above: One of the four rivers that flow through Cuenca.**