



Why We Should Stop Trying to Avoid Each Other

By Chakell Wardleigh
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While scrolling on Instagram, I saw an amusing meme that said, “I wonder how many miles my thumb scrolls a day.” I smirked at first (and shared the post with my friends, obviously), but then I really thought about it: “How many miles *does* my thumb scroll on social media every day?”

I can’t give you an exact number, but I made an estimate: a lot.

But things have been different ever since the October 2018 general conference, when President Russell M. Nelson invited sisters to fast from social media for 10 days.¹ At first, I was eager to follow his counsel. I thought it would take minimal effort and that the 10 days would just fly by. What I wasn’t prepared for was realizing that I use social media as a sort of

“social-interaction shield” when I’m in public. I was ashamed when I realized that I do it so much more than I thought!

Social media often engulfs me in an impenetrable bubble that keeps me from socializing—which is ironic because it’s supposed to be a means of connecting with others. But when a stranger gets into the elevator with me? I pull out my phone to avoid small talk. When I’m walking down a street filled with people? My eyes are glued to my screen so that nobody makes eye contact with me. And the list goes on—all those times when I’m “at risk” of socializing.

Unsticking myself from social media for 10 days really opened my eyes to how often I and so many of us use all kinds of social-interaction shields to isolate ourselves from others and avoid socializing—which can eventually make us all feel super lonely.

Some young adults are becoming super lonely. But the thing is, we don’t have to be alone.

Connection Is Powerful

With all the opportunities we have as young adults to build friendships and relationships—college, singles wards, and institute, for example—you would think that we shouldn't be lonely, right? Well, according to some research, we young adults are becoming known as one of the loneliest generations the world has ever seen.² But why? Well, it's hard to pinpoint one culprit for this epidemic of loneliness. But technology, fear, busyness, self-doubt, pride, difficult trials, and yes, even social media itself make it so very easy to disconnect ourselves from others—both intentionally and unintentionally.

When it comes to loneliness, everybody is different. For some people, loneliness can spark inspiration to go out and find somebody to lean on. But for a lot of us, loneliness can cause us to even further isolate ourselves from everybody else for a variety of reasons.

Take me, for example. Apart from using social media as a social crutch, I can think of some difficult times in my life when I was overwhelmed, anxious, and feeling terribly alone. And even though I had friends and people to talk to, I chose not to. I pretended everything was fine. I let my fear get the better of me. I don't know if it was out of fear of judgment or of not wanting to be a burden to others because of what I was dealing with, but regardless, I chose to isolate myself. And not connecting with anyone only made my loneliness worse. But the thing is, I've now learned that no matter what we are going through or how different we may be, we all need real-life, face-to-face, genuine connection to thrive. We're wired for it. All of us.

What exactly does connecting with someone entail? Brené Brown, a social science researcher who has spent much of her life studying the value of connection, defines it “as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”³

Connecting with others is one of the reasons we are here on earth! Think about these things we've been commanded to do as disciples of Christ, all of which are only possible through connecting to others: “love one another” (John 15:12); “strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32); “bear one another's burdens” (Mosiah 18:8); “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (Doctrine and Covenants 81:5). And there are so many opportunities to connect to others and to receive love and show love every day. We shouldn't allow busyness to isolate us and prevent us from extending or receiving that love.

We Don't Have to Be Alone

When I feel lonely, I often think about Moroni in the Book of Mormon. In my mind, his circumstances are the epitome of loneliness. Moroni lost everything—his family, his friends, and everything else in between. (See Mormon 8:5.)

Moroni's final chapters in the Book of Mormon break my heart. He was truly alone. He had no one to turn to, apart from God. My own seasons of loneliness hardly compare with what Moroni went through. And that's just it—I'm sure Moroni would have given anything to have a friend in those last

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days of his life; but unlike Moroni, we sometimes isolate *ourselves* when we don't have to be alone.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Because Jesus walked such a long, lonely path utterly alone, *we* do not have to do so. His solitary journey brought great company for our little version of that path—the merciful care of our Father in Heaven, the unfailing companionship of this Beloved Son, the consummate gift of the Holy Ghost, angels in heaven, family members on both sides of the veil, prophets and apostles, teachers, leaders, friends. All of these and more have been given as companions for our mortal journey.”⁴

Heavenly Father doesn't want us hiding behind shields and isolating ourselves, even though sometimes it's easier (and definitely more comfortable!), because doing so makes it difficult for Him to use us to bless and help others. Yes, sometimes things like depression, anxiety, or even fear of leaving your comfort zone can make it difficult to reach out to others—I can relate to that on a personal level. But even when it's scary and you're afraid of making a fool of yourself (trust me, I know the feeling!), I know that if you pray to Heavenly Father for help, He will give you the strength and courage to try. He wants us to

connect with and lift one another and allow others to lift us.

By following Jesus Christ and listening to promptings from the Spirit, we can lower our social shields and connect with those around us, even in small ways. We can show love and acceptance to others just as the Savior did

during His mortal ministry. And that comes full circle, because it reminds us all that we are not alone in this gigantic, unpredictable world, and it helps us become more like Him.

We all belong, and we all deserve love and connection. We can change the reputation of being the loneliest generation! Our Heavenly Father and the Savior can help us do so. And as we do our best to connect with others, we will see heaven's hand in our lives, we will give and receive blessings, we will receive help in our struggles, we will combat loneliness, we will build beautiful relationships, and we will feel peace and love in our lives that we can share with others. I know I have. ■

NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters' Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 69.
2. See Fiza Pirani, “Why Are Americans So Lonely? Massive Study Finds Nearly Half of US Feels Alone, Young Adults Most of All,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 1, 2018, ajc.com.
3. Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010), 19.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland “None Were with Him,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 88.



Chakell Wardleigh is a writer for the Ensign.

You can usually find her smelling flowers, taking a long time to tell stories because she keeps getting side tracked, getting sucked into books and podcasts, or being distracted by cute dogs. In fact, she's just easily distracted by the beautiful things in life.