

New Members: This Is Where You Belong

Are you trying
to meet
the wrong
expectations?



By Brian S. King

When you meet someone, how do you introduce yourself? What things are important to your identity? My name is Brian. And I belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But I haven't always felt like I belonged.

I joined the Church my first year of college. What seemed like only moments after my baptism, well-intended members started asking, "Will you serve a mission?" A mission wasn't something I had been able to give serious thought to yet. But I felt like the expected answer was yes.

Am I Enough?

Just over a year after I joined the Church, I received my call to serve in England and arrived eager to teach. But within a few days, I realized how homesick I was. I was not prepared to serve a full-time mission.

While discussing my feelings with my mission president, he felt impressed to sing "There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today" (*Hymns*, no. 227) over the phone. It struck me as a little odd, but it brought me feelings of light and warmth.

And yet a week later I was on a plane heading home. I wrestled with my feelings the entire flight. I felt overwhelmed worrying about what others might be thinking about my choices. I was angry at myself that I didn't serve a full two years—after all, I had left behind friends and family and postponed school to serve a mission. I had endured so much heartache, and now it just felt like Heavenly Father had abandoned me in my time of need. I wondered if I even belonged anymore because I hadn't lived up to every expectation.



Come as You Are

A week after coming home, my best friend's family invited me over to watch a session of general conference. It was the last thing I wanted to do. But I went.

Halfway through the session, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland walked to the podium and said, "There is sunshine in my soul today"—the same thing my mission president had unexpectedly sung two weeks earlier. The Spirit whispered, "This is the Church you belong in." Over the next 15 minutes, my entire perspective changed.

It's easy to feel like we don't belong when we feel like we've fallen short of each other's expectations. But we all fall short (see Romans 3:23). And yes, God says there is still a place for each of us in His Church (see 1 Corinthians 12:20–23).

Elder Holland taught during that conference talk: "'Come as you are,' a loving Father says to each of us. But He adds, 'Don't plan to stay as you are' " ("Songs Sung and Unsung," *Ensign*, May 2017, 51). God wants us here no matter who we are or what we've done because it allows Him to help us change who we'll become (see 3 Nephi 18:22).

Before hearing Elder Holland's talk, I thought belonging meant meeting every expectation. Now I understand better that the Lord's Church isn't for those who are already perfect but to help perfect those who aren't. And when you are trying to follow Him, you belong in His Church. ■



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FIVE THINGS I wish I would have known as a new member:

1. **Be yourself.** Your unique personality and gifts strengthen the Church as a whole (see 1 Corinthians 12).
2. **Join in.** Surrounding yourself with others who share your values will help you stay on the covenant path.
3. **Go to the temple.** Spending time in the temple—or preparing to go—will help you keep an eternal perspective.
4. **Focus on what's most important.** When things get overwhelming, focus on keeping and preparing for covenants.
5. **Be patient with yourself.** Don't judge yourself against others as you progress at your own pace.

