

YOUNG ADULTS



My Daily Battle against Loneliness

By Shaila Mahabier

For the longest time in my life, I felt as if I was all alone. At first, loneliness was a new feeling for me, because I come from a family of five, so as a kid, I always enjoyed the crowd and noise around me at home. I knew I wasn't alone.

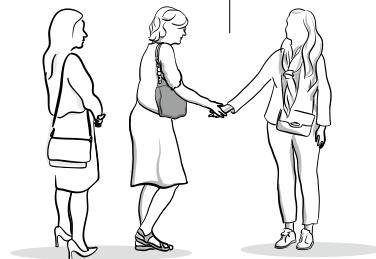
Sadly enough, in my teenage years, my parents split up. After that, I really started to feel alone. I tried to figure out what to do, going out of my comfort zone to make friends at school. I was hoping I could enjoy the familiarity of lots of people at school, like I used to at home. But even though I was surrounded by people, I still felt alone. This feeling lessened a

few years later when I found the Church.

One day the sister missionaries knocked on my door and my mother answered. I remember her telling them, "Well, I am not interested, but my daughter would be. Wait, I will get her."

When I started to talk to them, I could feel the Spirit telling me to listen. After a few months of listening and learning, I knew that this was what I had been looking for. Even though it didn't feel like it to begin with, my decision to be baptized helped me to come not only closer to the Lord and but also closer to ending my ongoing battle against loneliness.

In a lot of ways, joining the Church increased the loneliness I had felt since my parents' divorce. But it also helped me find a way out of my loneliness.



Feeling Lonely as a Convert

When I decided that I wanted to be baptized, my family wasn't really excited about it. Although my mother and one of my brothers attended my baptism, other family members rejected me because we no longer shared the same religion.

In the beginning, this was quite hard, and I felt more alone than ever. But after a while, one of my cousins decided to become a devout Hindu, which was also different from what the rest of our family practiced. He respected my choice to join the Church because he had made a similar one. Because of his example of love towards me, some of my other family members stopped shunning me.

At school, I realized that I didn't really fit in anymore. And at work, people looked at me in an odd way when I told them I had gotten baptized. I did not feel ashamed—my decision wasn't wrong, and I knew that from the bottom of my heart—but my friends didn't understand my lifestyle changes, and most of them decided to stop being friends with me.

Making New Friends

Through all these difficult experiences, I kept praying, and I could feel the comfort I was promised by the Spirit in a priesthood blessing I had received. One day I dared to ask the question, in prayer, "Why do I feel so alone?" And I received an answer or, rather, a promise—that I would make new friends, friends who would understand me.

And I did! I made new friends, some who aren't members of the Church but who still respect and love me. I also made friends in the Church who have become like family to me.

Being an introvert and having to talk to people wasn't the easiest thing for me. Most of the time I let people approach me, but in high school there weren't a lot of people who wanted to talk to me. So I was happy that I remembered this old trick I had learned—I smiled. The more someone smiles, the more approachable that person will become. I realized the more I smiled at people, the more they would start talking to me and the easier it became for me to become friends with them.





Standing with Heavenly Father

A better answer to my prayer was President Thomas S. Monson's (1927–2018) talk "Dare to Stand Alone" (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 60–67). Over time, this talk has taught me one very essential thing about loneliness: you never stand alone when you stand with the Lord.

There are still days when it is hard for me to stand with Him. The fear of other people mocking me and my beliefs is hard. There have been people telling me that any religion is nonsense and that I am being led like a dumb sheep. After finding out about my religion, some people have treated me as if I had a terrible infectious disease. All of these experiences made me feel a little insecure and lonely. It is a daily battle, but it's one I win every day, over and over again, with the help and full support of the Lord.

On a daily basis, I try to follow the Spirit. Whenever I listen to the Spirit and talk with people, inspiration from the Spirit enables me to serve others. It gives me an opportunity to remember that I am not alone. Most importantly, listen-

ing to the Spirit always gives me the chance to share my testimony. I have realized that sharing my belief this way helps me to be less scared and more understood by others. Before I realized it, I was not alone—talking to whomever I was talking to at that moment—I was standing with the Spirit. With the Spirit on your side, you can never be alone.

Throughout many years and moments of feeling lonely, the Lord has told me repeatedly that I am His beloved daughter and that He loves me. How can I ever feel alone if I have my Father standing with me? How can I feel alone if He is just one simple prayer away?

In my daily battle against loneliness, I call on my Heavenly Father not just to stand by me but to help me always stand by Him. I know that He has never left me to battle anything alone and has always stood by me, loving me. ■

The author lives in Prague, Czech Republic.