

Don't Ask "What's Wrong with Me?" Find Out "What's Right with Me?"

Abigail Morris

"June 2—Today is the happiest day of your life."

I read the words of my friend's letter with a grimace. He lived in London and had not yet received the news that I was not getting married today.

"More like the worst day," I thought. At that time I didn't know that the days and months ahead would bring even more loneliness, pain, and self-doubt than I felt then.

I put the letter down, feeling overwhelmed by reruns of the past. Over the past few years I had had several opportunities for marriage, but no other relationship had felt so right. My former fiancé was a wonderful person, from a wonderful family. I had fasted and prayed and felt good about accepting his proposal. Why hadn't things worked out? "What is wrong with me?" I thought. "Will I ever get married?"

Throughout my life I have been blessed with a close relationship with Heavenly Father. He has loved, guided, and comforted me during times of trial and suffering. But this time I felt forsaken. Questions and the half-hidden stares of curious acquaintances made things worse. Those who were more blunt asked, "Why do you think you felt so good about the relationship when things didn't work out?" As I grew more lonely and less at peace with myself and others, I allowed my sense of self-worth to turn into self-doubt and pity. Months of struggle followed.

Now, though, while I am still single, I feel whole, happy, and at peace. What has made the difference? Building and maintaining self-esteem. It is a constant and sometimes demanding process, but I have discovered some principles that have helped me to understand and value myself as a child of God.

Build a Strong Relationship with Heavenly Father

My life began to change when, in desperation, I earnestly sought to renew my relationship with my Heavenly Father. After the breakup of my engagement, I had felt so hurt and abandoned that my prayers and scripture study had been halfhearted. One night, when I felt so miserable I knew I couldn't endure the pain anymore, I poured out my soul in prayer. It didn't start out as a humble prayer. I was hurt, angry, and demanding. But as I felt Heavenly Father's love for me and his concern about my suffering, my heart softened. My petitions became more humble. I acknowledged that he knew what was best. Through the whisperings of the Spirit, he taught me that I needed to learn to

forgive before my pain could be healed. He helped me realize that I had been holding on to pain and pride, and that pride can destroy one's sense of self-worth.

As my prayers became sincere and soul-sustaining, my desire to feast upon the words of Christ grew. I remembered counsel from my patriarchal blessing: "Study and learn the words proclaimed in this great volume, the Book of Mormon. It was reserved for you that you may learn of the will of the Lord. It will strengthen you—you will need it." Since receiving my blessing, I had read the Book of Mormon many times, but this time as I read it, I was taught new lessons by the Spirit.

My love for the Savior grew as I read about his visit to the Nephites and about how he bade each member of the multitude to "arise and come forth unto [him]" (3 Ne. 11:14) so that each of them could feel his wounds and gain a personal testimony of his atonement. The next day, he bade the afflicted to come forward, and "he did heal them every one." (3 Ne. 17:9; italics added.) Later, "he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

"And when he had done this he wept." (3 Ne. 21–22; italics added.)

It would have been easy for Jesus to stand before the multitude and teach the group about the Atonement. He could have offered a prayer to heal the suffering and to bless the children. But because of his great love for each of them, he touched and blessed them, one by one. As I read, I felt his love for me, and I wept.

In the October 1986 general conference, President Ezra Taft Benson promised: "There is a power in the [Book of Mormon] which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find great power to resist temptation ... to avoid deception ... [and] to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the 'words of life' (see D&C 84:85), and ... when you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance." (Ensign, Nov. 1986, p. 7.)

I know these promises are true. Regular scripture study also brought me many other blessings. My faith began to grow—not only in the gospel, but also in myself. I realized that God is a loving Heavenly Father who is preparing us to inherit his kingdom. He has given us, his children, important roles to fulfill in his plan for our happiness.

Avoid Comparisons

During my times of self-doubt I had a tendency to compare myself with others. Sometimes proud, sometimes despondent—depending on the results of the comparison—I was so busy competing with others that I was blind to my own unique blessings, gifts, talents, and opportunities to serve. I realize now that I need not wait until my situation is ideal before I can love, nurture, teach, and strengthen. In fact, delay of the fulfillment of dreams can provide an opportunity for better preparation. Our challenge, whether we are married or single, is to recognize and rise to our unique opportunities to learn, grow, and serve.

Even when we understand the purposes of challenges, rising to our potential is a soul-stretching experience. In Ether 12:27, the Lord tells us, "If men come unto me I will show unto them their weak-

ness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”

As we humbly and diligently seek to do the Lord’s will, he will help us to grow, and through his grace, we will be made strong. The Bible Dictionary says that “it is ... through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts.” (LDS edition of the King James Bible, p. 697.)

Be Patient with Your Progress

Even with the Lord’s help, there have been times when my challenges have seemed overwhelming. But I have come to understand that feelings of inadequacy are normal and can be overcome. Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s words gave me some perspective on this subject: “Some of us who would not chastise a neighbor for his frailties have a field day with our own. Some of us stand before no more harsh a judge than ourselves. ... Fortunately, the Lord loves us more than we love ourselves.” (Ensign, Nov. 1976, p. 13.)

Elder Maxwell suggests that one way we can overcome feelings of inadequacy is to learn to “distinguish more clearly between divine discontent and the devil’s dissonance, between dissatisfaction with self and disdain for self. We need the first and must shun the second. ... When conscience calls to us from the next ridge, it is not solely to scold but also to beckon.” (Ibid., p. 14.)

When we are too hard on ourselves, small mistakes can cripple us with discouragement. I remember saying something foolish to a friend one time. I regretted my words immediately and mentally flogged myself for the mistake. I then felt these words come to my mind—almost as clearly as if someone had spoken them: “What do you wish you had said? If you could do it all over again, what would you do?” Encouraged, I “rehearsed” the scene in my mind. That afternoon my friend stopped by to visit again, and this time I was able to convey my feelings warmly and accurately.

I now keep a “practice list.” When I blunder or don’t handle a particular situation the way I would have liked to, I put the experience on my “list.” In the evening I review the day and mentally “rehearse” the way I would like to handle such situations in the future. Now, instead of being harsh with myself, I’m much more likely to learn from my mistakes and then move on. As I became more patient with myself, setting goals became exciting. And I found that, in the long run, I made much more progress by setting realistic goals than by trying to achieve too much too quickly.

Love and Serve Others

When I first became “disengaged,” my family and friends were a tremendous source of support. Their visits, telephone calls, and letters brought me a great deal of love and encouragement. But in spite of their kindness and their best efforts, I still felt lonely. I allowed my pain to make me self-centered, and my self-esteem suffered immensely.

One afternoon when I felt almost smothered by loneliness, I visited a married friend. We chatted as we did the dishes, and after a while, we lapsed into a comfortable silence. When she spoke, her words surprised me: "I felt so lonely today. Your visit cheered me up."

"Why would she be lonely?" I wondered. She was married and had a wonderful family relationship. I had attributed my loneliness to my being single, but her comment helped me to realize that everyone, regardless of marital status, experiences loneliness and struggles. I believe that some of our feelings of loneliness may really be longings for our eternal home.

Not much later I received a demanding assignment that required me to reach outside myself in service. In trying to help others, I found myself forgetting about my own problems! I had thought that my burden was so heavy that it would be hard for me to help someone else, but when I did, I felt much better.

Service helped me put my problems in perspective. It also helped me feel more worthwhile. Jesus taught that by losing ourselves in service to others, we find ourselves. (See Matt. 10:39.) President Spencer W. Kimball explained this apparent paradox in this way: "The more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our souls. We become more significant individuals. ... Indeed, it is easier to 'find' ourselves because there is so much more of us to find!" (Ensign, July 1978, p. 3.)

June 2 was not the happiest day of my life, but it was an important milestone for me. My broken engagement marked the beginning of personal trials that brought me great blessings and understanding. Through those difficult times, I have learned more about who I am and about my relationship with my Heavenly Father. Service, patient progress, and a close relationship with my Heavenly Father have helped my self-esteem to grow.

In the words of Elder Orson F. Whitney, quoted by President Spencer W. Kimball, "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. ... All that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God. ... It is through sorrow, suffering, toil, and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven." (Tragedy or Destiny, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, p. 4.)

Abigail Morris, "Don't Ask 'What's Wrong with Me?' Find Out 'What's Right with Me?' " Ensign, Mar. 1989, 36