

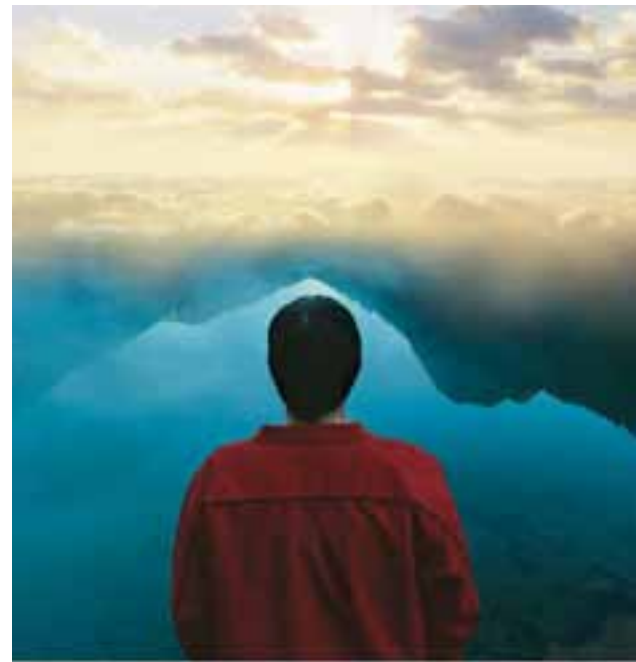
LOVE, HOPE, AND PEACE

Receiving the diagnosis was devastating. What kind of future would I have?

NAME WITHHELD

I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a college student, shortly after returning from my mission. Receiving the diagnosis of mood highs and lows was devastating. I was already in a deep depression, and the news sent me reeling. I reevaluated my sense of self-worth and wondered how I was going to reconcile my expectations for my future with this illness. As I learned more about bipolar disorder, I began to question everything in my life. Fortunately, with the passage of time and through the grace of Heavenly Father, I came through this difficult time a stronger person. My faith was renewed and strengthened.

I wish to share some of my experiences with this illness and the lessons I have learned through them. In doing so, I hope to help those with similar challenges and give insight to those with loved ones who struggle with mental illness. I also hope to dispel some misconceptions and increase understanding about people who are mentally ill.



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Perfection and Humility

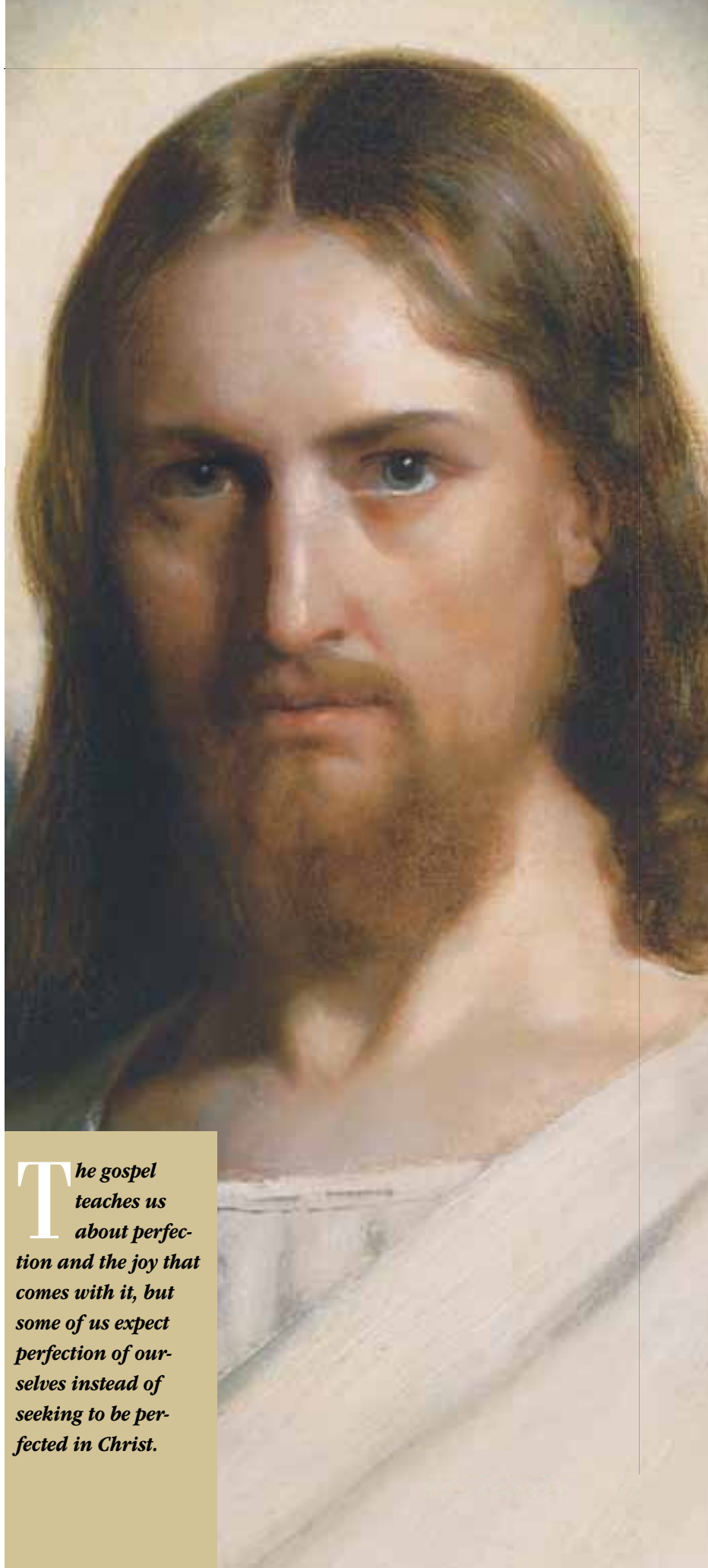
The gospel teaches us about perfection and the joy that comes with it, but some of us expect perfection of ourselves instead of seeking to be perfected in Christ. I struggled with the large gap between perfection and where I perceived I stood, made even more obvious by my illness. I regained hope when I realized that although sin is an imperfection, not all imperfection is sin.

Believing that we should achieve perfection on our own, some of us fill our lives with crippling guilt and an unforgiving attitude toward our inevitable human weakness. We limit our potential for growth through a faithless, unreasonable approach to life. A better approach is to channel our weakness so that instead of filling us with self-loathing, it helps us find humility and strengthen our faith in the Savior. In partnership with Him, we can overcome our weakness as well as our sins. True humility will help us understand our worth despite mental illness—or any other human frailty. It engenders confidence and a realization of the potential each of us has for good.

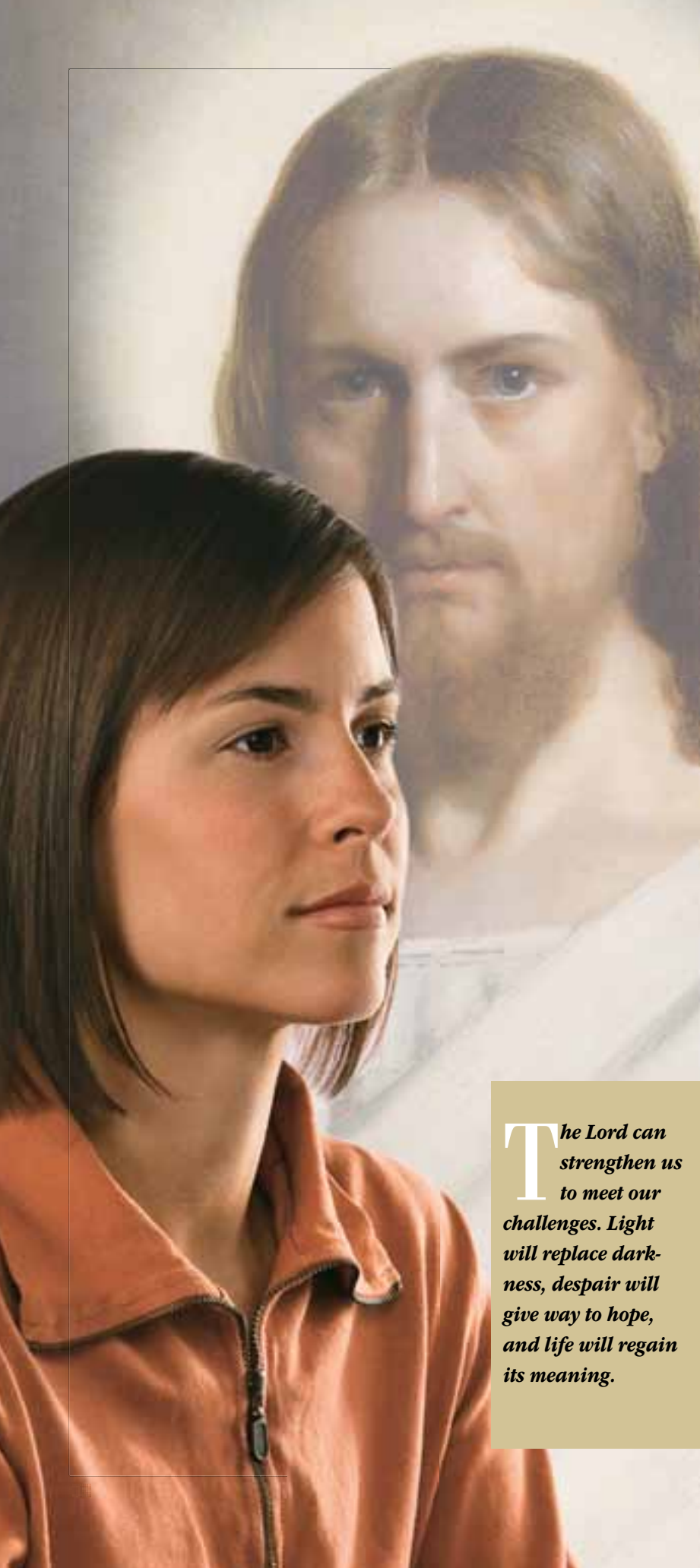
Hope and Depression

Many people suffer from depression at some time in their lives and know its crippling effects. Undirected guilt, loneliness, despair, and feelings of worthlessness are all distressing symptoms. One can lose the ability to perform daily tasks and cope with life's various obligations.

It is common to hear a talk in which sin is identified as the cause of depression. Sin certainly can cause us to sink into a deep abyss, but it is not the cause of all feelings of depression. When we are depressed, we



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must be willing to honestly look at our lives to try to determine the trigger.

If sin is weighing us down, then we must show, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “the faith to try again,” knowing that “spirit sons and daughters of God need not be permanently put down.”¹ The Savior’s Atonement can rescue us from the pains of sin and make us clean again. Depression may not be immediately lifted upon complete repentance, but we can still move forward. We can forgive ourselves for the sins for which we have repented rather than allowing sin to harrow our minds and needlessly prolong our suffering. Through Christ we can overcome our sins and look forward in hope and have our happiness restored in the Lord’s time.

In instances when sin is *not* the cause of depression, it is crucial that we not second-guess ourselves. Feelings of profound guilt are common in people who are depressed. In such circumstances, the guilt is usually not proportional to the trivial mistakes they may have made. Realizing that guilt is unsubstantiated may not eliminate it, but this knowledge can temper the severity of these feelings.

I have learned firsthand that feelings of guilt are difficult and require patience, but I have also learned that in such times, the Lord can strengthen us to enable us to meet the challenge. Happiness will return, and former capacity will be restored. Light will replace darkness, despair will give way to hope, and life will regain its meaning.

Peace and Support

People dealing with any kind of mental illness will need help weathering the storm;

this help might come in the form of a professional counselor, a caring friend, or a loving family member. Seeking professional help can be difficult, but when it is necessary, it can help us cope and find fulfillment. Embarrassment and fear should not prevent our seeking help, robbing us of the good in life. We have a responsibility to ourselves, to the people who love us, and to Heavenly Father to do all we can to overcome our weaknesses and make the most of our lives.

Good friends and loving family members can give support and withhold judgment. I am grateful for the people in my life who know my limitations but still accept and love me. I try to serve them as well; it is important that these relationships do not become unbalanced. Each of us has a responsibility to be a good friend and family member. Everyone needs to serve and be served.

Wherever else we find help, we will need it most from our loving Savior. He has suffered all of our pains and understands us completely (see Alma 7:11; see also Isaiah 53). Through Him we can find peace, be cleansed from sin, and find the strength to endure our trials. The Savior's loving embrace provides shelter through any trial and love in any circumstance. Likewise, approaching our Heavenly Father in prayer allows us to plead with Him and receive His loving guidance and comfort.

The Priesthood

In times of deep depression I have felt lonely and have been unable to feel the peace and love that often accompany prayer. In these dark times I have wondered if I have offended God and consequently been cut off from His presence completely. These times are especially trying since the reassurance we need feels impossible to receive.

During an especially severe period, I prayed constantly for an answer to a particular problem that was very important to me. After weeks of frustration I was finally humble enough to ask a good friend who was aware of my illness for a priesthood blessing. I did not mention my specific question, only that I was having a difficult time. In the blessing I was given my answer in direct, clear language,



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and I was filled with a peace that soothed my troubled soul. My friend did not realize he had facilitated the answer to my prayer, but I knew that I was not alone. God knew my needs, and although my depression was not immediately healed, He had given me the gifts I needed most: an answer, peace, and hope.

Since that experience I have developed a great appreciation for the power of the priesthood. I have learned the humility to ask for and accept help. I also have an increased desire to honor my priesthood so I might be able to bless others in their time of need. I am extremely grateful for worthy priesthood holders who can provide blessings when I need them most.

A Search for Truth

Mental illness is unique from other human frailties since it can impair our ability to think, reason, and feel the Spirit. I believe it is for this reason that mental illness is often feared and misunderstood. We live in a wonderful time when the Lord has blessed us with all the marvels of modern science, including improved medication. Where mental illness might once have destroyed lives, many of those who deal with it can now control their illness and live relatively normal lives.

I am extremely grateful for my testimony. As time has passed, it has become clear to me that those precious experiences that formed the foundation of my testimony were not valuable only for the time they were given; they have continued to give me strength later in life when I've needed to rely on the reservoir of faith granted to me by Heavenly Father. Despite the additional

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NOTHING BEYOND HIS HEALING TOUCH

“No grief is so great, no pain so profound, no burden so unbearable

that it is beyond His healing touch.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Special Witnesses of Christ,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2001, 9.

confusion that mental illness can cause in the search for truth, the Lord will visit us with His tender mercies, blessing us in

the hour of our need (see 1 Nephi 1:20).

No matter what our circumstances are, God understands what we need and how best to give it to us. He is “no respecter of persons” (D&C 38:16) and loves mankind (see John 3:16). He will bless each of us how and when we need it. Regardless of our challenges in life, He loves and guides us individually. Our faith in Him is the anchor for our lives. The grace of Christ is sufficient for all (see 2 Corinthians 12:9), and His love can reach us in any trial. We will struggle from time to time, but we can be sustained by faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

When the Savior was asked, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” He answered, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:2–3). Mental illness is not a punishment from God,² but His works are manifest in each of us when we allow the Atonement to work in our lives. We may not be healed immediately as the blind man was, but no matter what pain we bear, the Savior will heal us. Through His love and sacrifice we can find strength to overcome our trials, since He has already “overcome the world” (D&C 50:41). ■

NOTES

1. “The Tugs and Pulls of the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 37.
2. See Alexander B. Morrison, “Myths about Mental Illness,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2005, 33.

Helps for Those Suffering from Mental Illness

If you or a loved one is suffering from mental illness, you can find helpful information online at www.ldsfamilyservices.org. Additional information is available at the Disability Resources section of LDS.org under “Home and Family.”



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