

An illustration of a woman in a black top and red skirt being weighed down by several large, heavy sacks. The sacks are labeled with negative emotions: 'DEPRESSION', 'INSECURITY', 'DISCOURAGEMENT', 'ANXIETY', and 'DESPAIR'. The woman is looking up with a determined expression, holding onto the ropes of the sacks. The background is a dark, stormy sky with lightning.

TRUTHS & LIES

BY JENNIFER NUCKOLS

Satan regularly lies to us about the nature of God and of ourselves. But we don't have to listen.

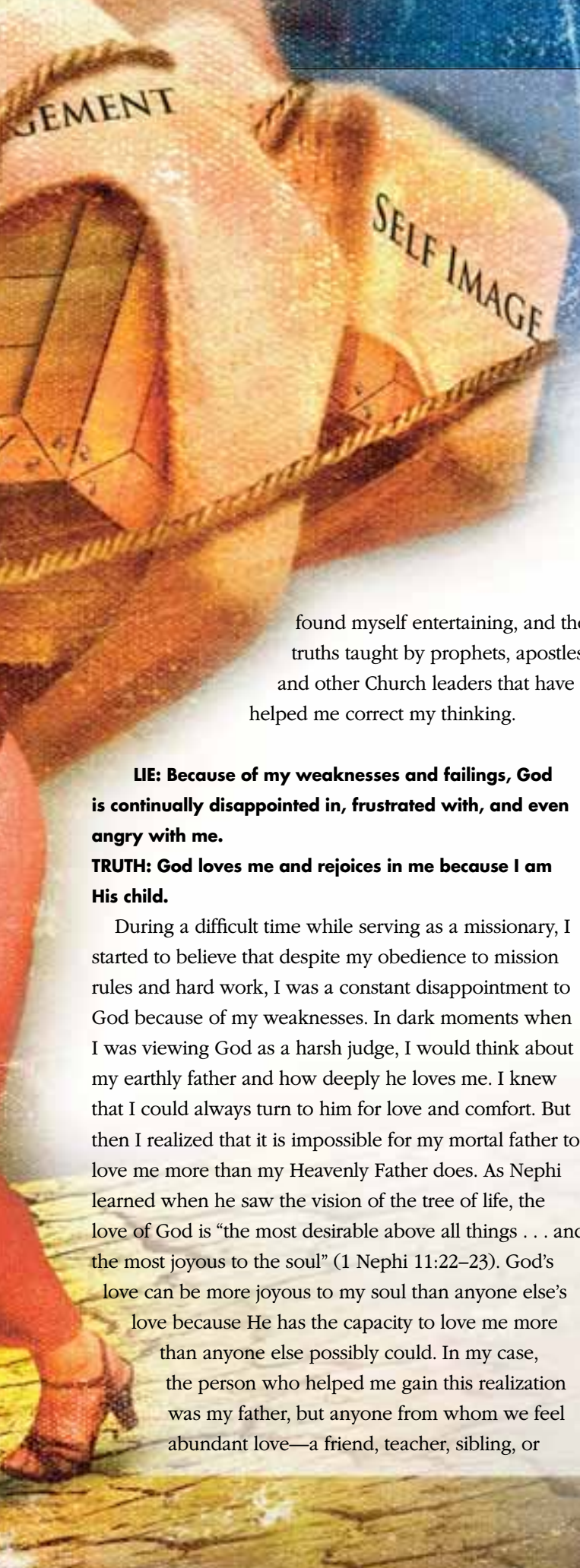
Some of the greatest battles in my life haven't been literal battles but struggles in my own heart and mind against feelings of self-doubt, hopelessness, and fear. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught that this would be the case in the latter days: “Satan is increasingly striving to overcome the Saints with despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression.”¹

One way that Satan attempts to overcome us with such feelings is by telling us lies about our worth and about God's feelings toward us. These lies may originate as simple thoughts that, repeated many times in our minds, can develop into entrenched habits of belief. These falsehoods are then reinforced by the media, things other people say, or even by misinterpretation of the scriptures. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has warned that “Satan might even misuse words from the scriptures that emphasize the justice of God, in order to imply that there is no mercy.”² Whatever their source, Satan's lies can take root in our minds and develop into feelings of depression, low self-worth, and inadequacy.

To combat such false beliefs that have negatively affected my attitudes and actions, I have tried to consciously identify my own damaging thoughts and replace them with gospel truths. In so doing, I have developed an increased ability to fight off Satan's tools of “despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression.” What follows are examples of the lies that I have

When we feel weighed down by feelings of inadequacy, truths from modern-day prophets and apostles can help us discard the burdensome—and sometimes inaccurate—messages we tell ourselves.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CARY HENRIE



found myself entertaining, and the truths taught by prophets, apostles, and other Church leaders that have helped me correct my thinking.

LIE: Because of my weaknesses and failings, God is continually disappointed in, frustrated with, and even angry with me.

TRUTH: God loves me and rejoices in me because I am His child.

During a difficult time while serving as a missionary, I started to believe that despite my obedience to mission rules and hard work, I was a constant disappointment to God because of my weaknesses. In dark moments when I was viewing God as a harsh judge, I would think about my earthly father and how deeply he loves me. I knew that I could always turn to him for love and comfort. But then I realized that it is impossible for my mortal father to love me more than my Heavenly Father does. As Nephi learned when he saw the vision of the tree of life, the love of God is “the most desirable above all things . . . and the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:22–23). God’s love can be more joyous to my soul than anyone else’s love because He has the capacity to love me more than anyone else possibly could. In my case, the person who helped me gain this realization was my father, but anyone from whom we feel abundant love—a friend, teacher, sibling, or

spouse—can teach us about the magnitude of God’s love. Understanding the magnitude of that love means I have someone I can turn to for love when I feel weak, not hide from in shame.

LIE: I’m not as righteous, spiritual, attractive, or kind as that other person; therefore, God must love that person more than He loves me.

TRUTH: God knows my individual potential and progress intimately. He does not compare or rank me with His other children.

The world often assesses people according to how their performance compares to someone else’s performance. Popular TV shows host competitions to rank people according to their talent and skill. However, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles teaches that God does not work that way:

“He does not mercilessly measure [His children] against their neighbors. He doesn’t even compare them with each other. His gestures of compassion toward one do not require a withdrawal or denial of love for the other. . . . I testify that no one of us is less treasured or cherished of God than another. I testify that He loves each of us—insecurities, anxieties, self-image, and all. He doesn’t measure our talents or our looks; He doesn’t measure our professions or our possessions.”³

These truths can help us resist Satan’s whisperings that we will never be as good as someone else. A full acceptance of this truth will allow us to find greater joy even in the midst of our current “insecurities, anxieties, [and] self-image. This knowledge will also increase our ability to rejoice in the blessings and successes of others.”

LIE: I need to prove that I’m worth loving by being perfect. Only when I’m perfect will I be able to experience love from God and from others.

TRUTH: Even though I’m not perfect now, I can have constant access to divine love.

While I was growing up, I felt an intense drive to do everything perfectly—from grades at school to supposed spiritual checklists. I had already bought into the lie that



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught that we should “write down in a secure place the important things you learn from the Spirit” (“To Acquire Knowledge and the Strength to Use It Wisely,” *Ensign*, June 2002, 32). After reading this article with your family, discuss the difference between the lies the world teaches, as stated in the article, and the truths taught by prophets, apostles, and other Church leaders. Invite your family to record these truths in their journals.

“May I speak, not to the slackers in the Kingdom, but to those who carry their own load and more; not to those lulled into false security, but to those buffeted by false insecurity, who, though laboring devotedly in the Kingdom, have recurring feelings of falling forever short. . . . There is a difference . . . between being ‘anxiously engaged’ and being over-anxious and thus underengaged. . . . We can 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, remembering that when conscience calls to us from the next ridge, it is not solely to scold but also to beckon.”⁶

As we honestly discern where we stand with God, we can eliminate the thoughts that would plague and depress us. Instead, we can replace those with thoughts that beckon and encourage us onward.

LIE: I have too many issues, hang-ups, and past mistakes to be blessed and happy.

TRUTH: No mistake, no personal challenge, no past circumstance is outside of the healing and redemptive power of the Atonement.

The anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon tried to convince people to renounce their faith in Christ. Even though we may profess belief in Christ, when we tell ourselves that we are outside the redemptive power of the Atonement, we are falling prey to a common deception of the greatest anti-Christ, Satan. In contrast, President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve teaches that “save for those few who defect to perdition after having known a fulness, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no offense exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. . . . Restoring what you cannot restore, healing the wound you cannot heal, fixing that which you broke and you cannot fix is the very purpose of the atonement of Christ.”⁷

flawless performance would increase my worth and make me more lovable. But such an attitude of perfectionism prevented me from consistently rejoicing in the Lord’s love for me because every time I failed to do something perfectly, I felt unlovable. Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, former Relief Society general president, asked, “Do we frequently reject the Lord’s love that He pours out upon us in much more abundance than we are willing to receive? Do we think we have to be perfect in order to deserve His love? When we allow ourselves to feel ‘encircled about eternally in the arms of his love’ (2 Nephi 1:15), we feel safe, and we realize that we don’t need to be immediately perfect.”⁴ Sister Parkin describes God’s love as something we can choose to either reject or allow ourselves to feel. Although we can make choices that enable us to experience a heightened or a lesser degree of God’s love,⁵ we can and should be partaking of God’s love now, even—and especially—in our imperfect state. We are worth loving because Christ thought that we were of enough worth to atone for us individually.

LIE: I’m a terrible failure. I’ll never be good enough because I keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

TRUTH: I’m not perfect, but the desires of my heart are good. I can feel inspired to progress.

While guilt or “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:10) can be a gift from God that inspires us to change and improve, Satan can also use guilt to demoralize us. Some people may not easily give in to large temptations, but if Satan can depress and immobilize those Saints through a false perception of their own unworthiness or inadequacies, then they become neutralized in the fight against evil. Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve (1926–2004) offered this comfort to those plagued by feelings of failure and excessive guilt:



Discerning the Truth about Ourselves

Sometimes these truths about ourselves and about God seem so wonderful that they can be difficult to accept. If we do not “resist the spirit of truth” (Alma 30:46) but instead allow the truths about ourselves and about our relationship with God to fill our souls, we will experience an increase of joy.

When a stray thought enters our mind, we can use the Spirit to help us discern whether it is a true thought from God or possibly a lie planted there by Satan because “the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13). We can tell a true thought because it will carry with it the sweet fruits of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22).

When we feel ourselves slipping into the “despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression” that President Benson described, we can ask ourselves if we may be holding onto a lie about ourselves or about God. We can seek out the truth in the words of the scriptures and the living prophets. We can pray for the ability to discern between truth and error. Empowered by the truth, we will find the strength to keep Satan at bay and experience the joy of having “the truth of all things” abide in us (Moses 6:61). ■

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “Do Not Despair,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 65.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Point of Safe Return,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 99.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Other Prodigal,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 63–64.
4. Bonnie D. Parkin, “Eternally Encircled in His Love,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 108.
5. See Russell M. Nelson, “Divine Love,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2003, 20–25.
6. Neal A. Maxwell, “Notwithstanding My Weakness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 12–14.
7. Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 19–20.

Empowered by truth, we can discard inaccurate messages with thoughts that beckon and encourage us onward.