

LET VIRTUE GARNISH THY THOUGHTS UNCEASINGLY



I wish to speak pointedly about how to have a very special kind of confidence—a confidence which, when rightfully earned, does wonders for every other aspect of our lives, especially our self-esteem and how we view the future.

BY ELDER JEFFREY R. HOLLAND
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

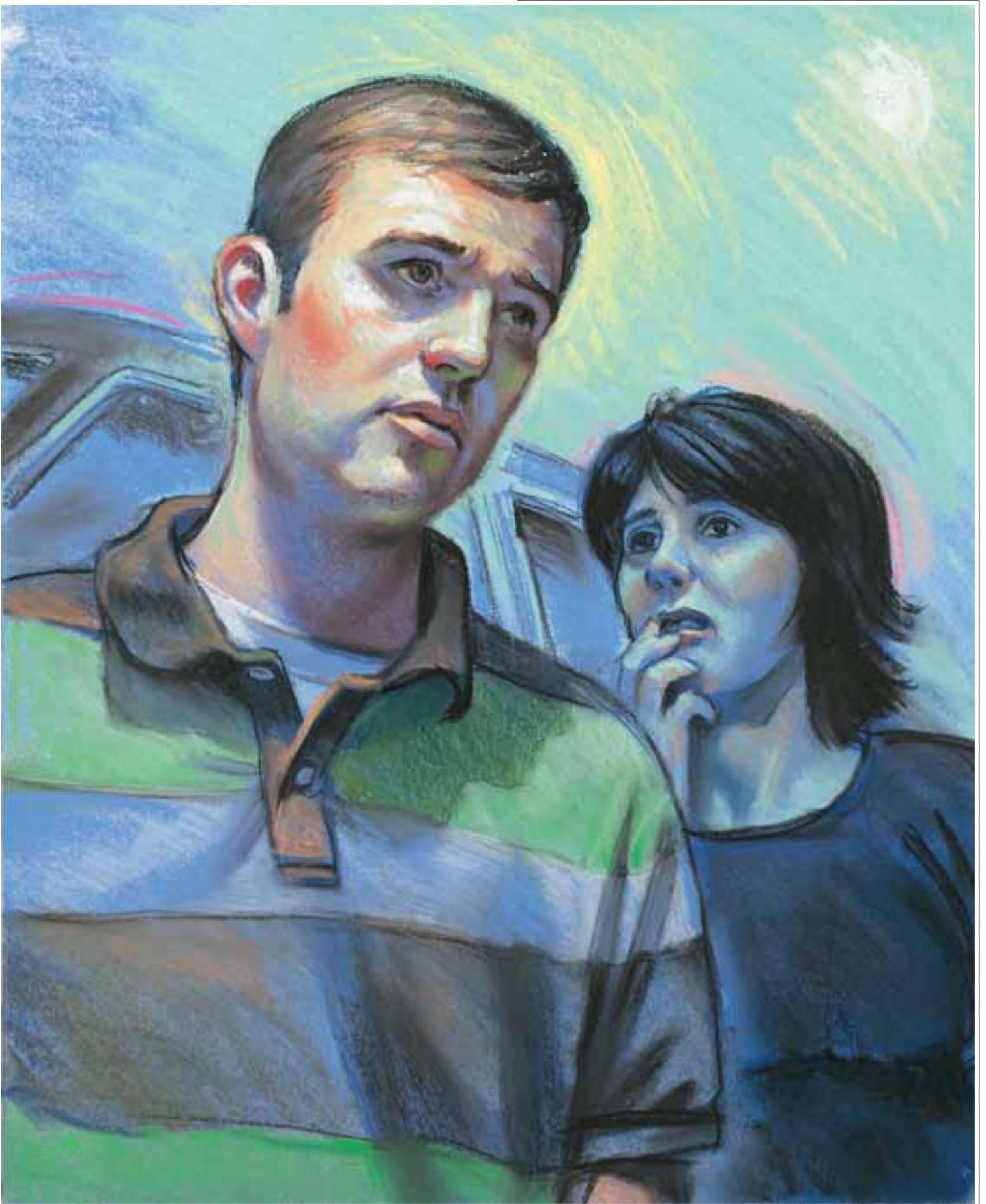
Don't fear the future. Be happy and healthy and optimistic.

My message to you is one of hope and encouragement now and for the rest of your lives. There are plenty of troubles in the world, but there have always been troubles in every age and era. Don't be preoccupied with them, and don't be discouraged by them. The coming years will be filled with wonderful opportunities and great blessings. We will continue to have advances in science and technology, medicine and communication—all the fields that do so much to enrich our lives. You live in the most glorious age the world has ever known, with more of the blessings of the day coming to more people around the world than any other time in history. Remember—your grandmother never dreamed of an iPod when she was your age, and your grandfather still has no idea how to text message. So, be happy and healthy and optimistic.

I say this in part because an article I read recently said the most common illness among young people today is not

diabetes or heart disease or cancer. (Those kinds of problems are usually reserved for people my age, not yours.) No, the illness that those in their teens and twenties suffer from most, it was reported, is self-doubt, fear about the future, low self-esteem, and a general lack of confidence in themselves and in the world around them.

Even though I am very much older than you, I do understand those kinds of concerns because for most of my young life I, too, seemed to face situations in which I didn't have very much self-confidence. I can remember striving for good grades, hoping to win a chance for a scholarship, and wondering why others seemed more gifted in that category than I. I can remember years and years of athletic contests in which I tried to play with the confidence necessary for success in high school and college sports, wanting so desperately to win the big game or bring home a coveted championship. I especially remember lacking confidence with girls, so often the great



anxiety-producer in young men. I am so grateful Sister Holland took a chance on me. Yes, I can remember all the things you remember—not being sure about how I looked or if I was accepted or what the future would hold for me.

My purpose here is not to discuss all those issues a young person faces which bring some self-doubt and some lack of confidence, but I wish to speak pointedly about how to have a very special kind of confidence—a confidence which, when rightfully earned, does wonders for every other aspect of our lives, especially our self-esteem and how we view the future. To make this point, I need to tell a story.

The Value of Personal Worthiness

Many years ago now, long before I was called as a General Authority, I participated as a speaker in a young adult conference. The conference concluded with a testimony meeting in which a handsome, young returned missionary stood up to bear his testimony. He looked good, clean, and confident—just like a returned missionary

should look.

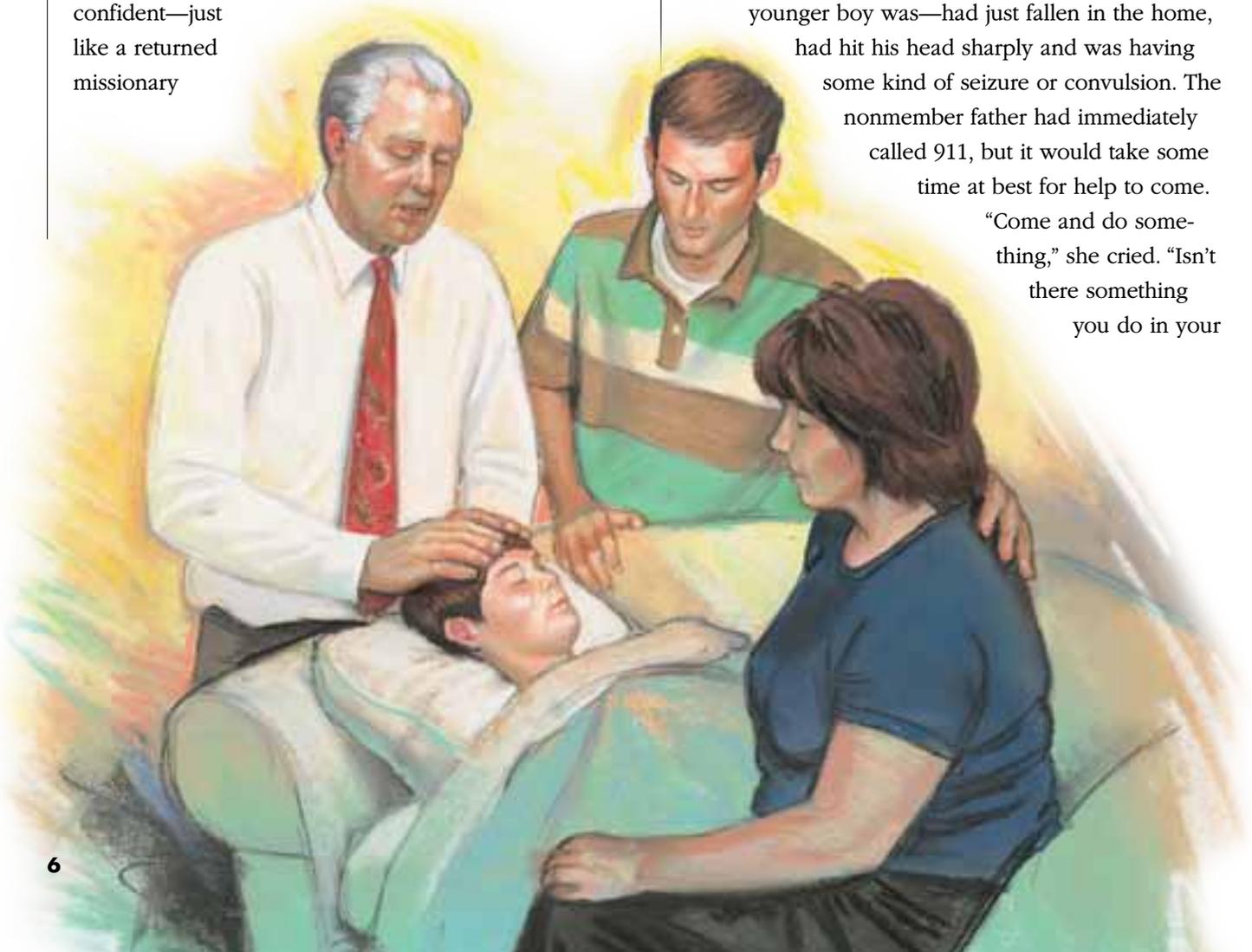
As he began to speak, tears came to his eyes. He said he was grateful to stand in the midst of such a terrific group of young Latter-day Saints and to feel good about the life he was trying to lead. But that feeling had only been possible, he said, because of an experience he had had a few years earlier, an experience that had shaped his life forever.

He then told of coming home from a date shortly after he had been ordained an elder at age 18. Something had happened on this date of which he was not proud. He did not go into any details, nor should he have done so in a public setting. To this day I do not know the nature of the incident, but it was significant enough to him to have affected his spirit and his self-esteem.

As he sat in his car for a while in the driveway of his own home, thinking things through and feeling genuine sorrow for whatever had happened, his nonmember mother came running frantically from the house straight to his car. In an instant she conveyed that this boy's younger brother—I do not know what the age of the younger boy was—had just fallen in the home,

had hit his head sharply and was having some kind of seizure or convulsion. The nonmember father had immediately called 911, but it would take some time at best for help to come.

“Come and do something,” she cried. “Isn't there something you do in your



Church at times like this? You have their priesthood. Come and do something.”

His mother didn’t know a lot about the Church at that point, but she knew something of priesthood blessings. Nevertheless, on this night when someone he loved dearly needed his faith and his strength, this young man could not respond. Given the feelings he had just been wrestling with, and the compromise he felt he had just made—whatever that was—he could not bring himself to go before the Lord and ask for the blessing that was needed.

He bolted from the car and ran down the street several hundred yards to the home of a worthy older man who had befriended him in the ward ever since the boy’s conversion two or three years earlier. An explanation was given, the older brother responded, and the two were back at the house still well before the paramedics arrived. The happy ending of this story as told in that testimony meeting was that this older man instantly gave a sweet, powerful priesthood blessing, leaving the injured child stable and resting by the time medical help arrived. A quick trip to the hospital and a thorough exam there revealed no permanent damage had been done. A very fearful moment for this family had passed.

Then the returned missionary of whom I speak said this: “No one who has not faced what I faced that night will ever know the shame I felt and the sorrow I bore for not feeling worthy to use my priesthood. It is an even more painful memory for me because it was my own little brother who needed me, and my beloved nonmember parents who were so fearful and who had a right to expect more of me. But as I stand before you today I can promise you this,” he said. “I am not perfect, but from that night onward I have never done anything that would keep me from going before the Lord with confidence and asking for His

help when it is needed. Personal worthiness is a battle in this world in which we live,” he acknowledged, “but it is a battle I am winning. I have felt the finger of condemnation pointing at me once in my life, and I don’t intend to feel it ever again if I can do anything about it. And, of course,” he concluded, “I can do *everything* about it.”

He finished his testimony and sat down. I can still picture him. I can still see the setting we were in. And I can still remember the stark, moving silence that followed his remarks as everyone in the room had occasion to search his or her soul a little deeper, vowing a little stronger to live by these powerful words given by the Lord: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; *then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God*; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dew from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth” (D&C 121:45–46; emphasis added).

Enjoying the Spirit of God

My beloved young friends, have a wonderful life. Think the best and hope the best and have faith in the future. You have a great life ahead of you. Your Heavenly Father loves you. If any mistakes have been made, they can be repented of and forgiven just as they were for this young man. You have everything to live for and plan for and believe in. To have the approval of your conscience when you are alone with your memories allows you to feel the Spirit of God in a very personal way. I want you to enjoy that Spirit, to feel that confidence in the presence of the Lord always. May virtuous thoughts keep our actions pure today and tomorrow and forever. **NE**

From a youth fireside given on December 31, 2006.

For more on this theme, read “Real Confidence,” *New Era*, Jan. 2007, p. 8.

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