

Chapter

3

*Undoing the Lies
About Us*

When the prophets tell us we need “clean hands,” they mean, of course, in the spiritual sense, but a comparison with the physical can help us understand the spiritual. For example, suppose you have been working on your car’s engine. Your hands are really grimy with ground-in oil and dirt. You wash with soap and water, but that’s not enough. What do you do? You use a stronger cleaner, maybe a solvent. You’d never consider cutting your hands off because they’re dirty. After all, it’s only the dirt that’s undesirable. Underneath the dirt, you know you still have a really good pair of hands, even if it takes strong measures to get them clean. So it is with our spiritual “hands,” our spiritual selves. God doesn’t want to cut *us* off, he wants to make us clean again.

Differentiating between who we are (our hands) and what we have done (the dirt on our hands) is an important step in learning to see the truth about ourselves. How *we* see *ourselves* is an integral part of everything we do. The way we behave is strongly influenced by the picture we have of ourselves. That is why the adversary conducts such a vicious campaign against our self-image. One avenue of attack comes through the messages from our society. Sexual transgression has been part of every age, and the times we live in are particularly permissive. Even so, there still exists a definite disdain or contempt for those who let their sexual urges get out of hand. Those of us who have been caught in these out-of-control sexual behaviors have felt this contempt. We have even joined in our own condemnation, shaming and blaming ourselves more

than anyone else could. This shame leads us to isolate ourselves from others, from society, and especially from God, thus cutting ourselves off from all sources of help and healing.

THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR BASIC CHARACTER

In the process of becoming trapped in addiction, we believe and accept a number of lies which make our enslavement possible. Recovery can be defined as a process of recognizing these lies and replacing them with truth. The sweet joy recovery brings comes from being reunited with the truth about God's character (as we covered in the last chapter) and also from reawakening to a knowledge of our own true character.

Joseph Smith taught a powerful lesson about understanding God and ourselves:

There are but a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God...If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 343)

If men do not comprehend God's character, they do not comprehend their own! Why would Joseph say that? I believe he was trying to tell us that we are—in our truest and deepest selves—more like our Heavenly Father than we can even imagine. It is not just symbolic or poetic language to call us children of God. As the apostle Paul said, **“We are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28)**. We are of the same family—the same species, the same race. We are the same kind of being. We are not just His creations, His puppets or His creatures. We are His *children*. Just as our physical bodies reflect characteristics of our earthly parents, our spirits have inherited many traits of our heavenly parents. Our Father and Mother in Heaven are immortal human beings, and although they are much farther along in their eternal progression, there are still many ways we are more *like* them than we are *different* from them. I imagine that those among us who have progressed the farthest, in their best moments are not very different in character from God. I believe that God has many of the same feelings, sentiments, and instincts we do.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus, our great High Priest, understands us far better than we understand ourselves. He remembers us as we once were, before the fall. He believes in us, even when we don't believe in ourselves. He believes in us, *even when we don't believe in Him*.

Paul talked about our relationship to God, and how we become more and more like our Father as we grow spiritually:

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:6–7)

The title "Abba" is an interesting one. In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Abba is not the formal term for "Father." Rather, it is the type of endearing term a small child might use, such as "Papa" or "Daddy" (Hugh Nibley, *BYU Studies*, vol. 19, 50). Jesus also used this term in the Lord's Prayer, which, if we heard it as He spoke it, might sound something like "Our Daddy, who art in heaven." The tenderness of this sweet relationship that the Spirit tells me I enjoyed with my "Daddy" in Heaven before my birth into mortality melts my heart and brings tears to my eyes.

SATAN TWISTS THE GIFT OF CONSCIENCE

One mission of both the Holy Ghost and the Light of Christ is to testify to us of the truth, even when the truth is that we have done something wrong. This is the gift of conscience. Sometimes, instead of taking courage in the promise of forgiveness for repentance, we allow Satan to twist this gift of conscience, using it to keep us in sin rather than to turn us back to God. Responding to the urging of the adversary, we give in to blame and shame. We take those thoughts of correction

and run with them down the field in the wrong direction—toward our opponent’s goal. We turn the Lord’s invitation to repent into a reason to demoralize ourselves and set ourselves up to be even more vulnerable to sin.

Thus, Satan uses the enticings of our own conscience to defeat us. Unlike the Lord, he doesn’t respect us and is totally devoid of integrity. He doesn’t fight fair. He entices us to sin, saying “Hey, this will be fun, this will be great—come and try this out! It’s not that bad. It won’t do any harm.” Then when we give in, he turns on us and sneers in our face, in a cruel, sadistic imitation of our conscience: “You sinner! You scum! You are the biggest slimeball in history. No one could possibly tolerate you (let alone love you) if they knew what you are *really* like.” On and on it goes. Is it any wonder the adversary is referred to as **“the accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10)**. The really sad part is that after a while, we take up the cry ourselves, becoming our own accusers. Our enemy has convinced us to join his side *against ourselves*, exactly as he intended. He knows if he can confuse our perception of our conscience enough, if he can get us to *identify ourselves* as sinners, we are that much easier to coax into sin. We act as we believe, and if we believe ourselves to be bad, we are much more likely to act badly. We say to ourselves: “Why shouldn’t I do (whatever)? That’s just the sort of person I am. There’s no point in expecting anything better from me.” Thus our negative beliefs contribute to our own defeat. As the scriptures tell us, **“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7)**.

When the Light of Christ, one function of which is our conscience, speaks to our hearts, we must learn to react in a balanced way. We cannot take our sins too lightly, minimizing their severity and short-changing our repentance. On the other hand, we must not be demoralized over our mistakes. We need to take courage and move forward, realizing the Lord has confidence in us, and that correction from Him is truly an evidence of His love:

**My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord,
nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the
Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son
whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God**

dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?...but he [chasteneth us] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:5–7, 10–11)

Not only is the Lord's correction done with love, but it arises from His desire to bring us peace, righteousness, and exaltation. While it is never a comfortable feeling to have our conscience witness to us that we have made a mistake and therefore need to repent, the corrections we receive are a reminder of the Lord's confidence in us and His invitation to us to become something better. Elder Neal A. Maxwell cautions:

What can we do to manage these vexing feelings of inadequacy?...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. (*Ensign*, November 1976, 14)

ASSAILED BY LIES

If I am truly the son of a divine, loving Father in Heaven, how did I come to see myself so negatively? How did I become convinced of the worst about myself? The apostle Paul gave us at least part of the answer:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)

We are not alone on this earth. Nor are all those who share this earth with us friendly. Satan and his followers have determined to destroy us, and they will continue that campaign until they are finally

bound and stopped. In the meantime, we have a battle on our hands. Even so, we should always keep in mind, as the Prophet Joseph put it:

All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 181)

As long as we resist the adversary, the only power he has is to lie to us. Yet this is still a formidable power. Lies are the basis of all the evil in the world. Every person who indulges in sin has accepted the lie that happiness can be found in sin.

Satan is also leading a major campaign to rob us of our knowledge of God. One of the most damaging lies Satan has perpetrated is that we cannot know our Heavenly Father. Some churches have been deceived into accepting this lie, teaching that God is “unknowable.” This lie robs us of the knowledge of our kinship with God, isolating us and making us easier to deceive and enslave.

In the midst of addiction, I wandered in a fog of lies—lies I believed, as well as lies I told. Before I could get free from addiction, I needed to become free from these damaging falsehoods that I both believed and acted upon. One of the most detrimental lies was this:

I am fundamentally a bad person because of my sins and my addiction. The fact that all my attempts at repentance have not freed me from these despicable behaviors must mean that my basic nature is really evil.

If you have never experienced firsthand the devastation of addiction, you may think this statement is an exaggeration. If you have struggled as I have, however, I think you will recognize these feelings. Sometimes I was so consumed with guilt that it was hard for me to see *anything* good about myself. It is one thing to feel remorse for a particular behavior, but I went in for wholesale condemnation. Today I realize that these self-judging thoughts didn’t come entirely from myself. The forces of evil are continually at work, striving to tear down every positive feeling we have toward ourselves.

THE LIE OF LABELING

Years ago I saw the movie “Dr. Zhivago.” I was struck by a scene where a middle-aged man was deviously carrying out an attack on a young woman’s basic character by saying: “There are two kinds of women in the world—and we both know which kind you are.” By trying to get the girl to define herself in a negative way, he hoped to convince her to behave according to that definition. Satan used the same sort of manipulation on me, and for many years, I believed his lies. “There are good men and there are those who give in to temptation. There are men who are above it all, and there are men who slip and fall. We both know which kind of man you are.” And so I came to believe another lie:

There are men who have never made mistakes anything like the mistakes I have made. They are practically perfect. I am fundamentally different from them and always will be. I am made of lesser stuff.

I have often looked at the prophets and other General Authorities, even my bishops and stake presidents, and thought what wonderfully spiritual men they are. I said to myself, “Surely these men have never been tempted by the sins I have participated in. They would never understand me or my challenges.” I thought these men were not only *better* than I was, but a better *kind* of man than I was. This sort of thinking kept me from seeking the friendship of those whom I considered to be truly good men, thinking “They wouldn’t want to be around someone like me.” I thought of these good men of the Church being like the priesthood holders Alma described, as **“pure and spotless before God, [who] could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence” (Alma 13:12)**. These men were certainly on a higher plane than I was. They didn’t even seem to have the same reaction to temptation that I did. In other words, sin wasn’t even appealing to them.

Well, I knew that surely wasn’t me. I didn’t look upon sin with abhorrence. I looked upon sin, first with curiosity, then with tolerance, then eventually with longing. I lived out Alexander Pope’s poem:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;

Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
 We first endure, then pity, then embrace.
 (Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*. Epistle ii. Line 217)

I didn't start out with this blatant acceptance of sin. There was a time, years and years ago, when I was repulsed by the world of sin which pornography represented. But years of toying with temptation eventually brought me to believe that sexual indulgence could be my cure-all. I used sex to comfort my feelings of uneasiness. Nevertheless, each time I acted on the temptation, the knowledge that I had been deceived, *yet again*, pierced my heart with inevitable clarity. Sin promised relief but only delivered sorrow and despair. I came to hate the *consequences* of sin, but unfortunately, this wasn't the "abhorrence" Alma spoke of. As I became increasingly trapped, it wasn't so much the sin I looked upon with abhorrence, it was me! Although I suffered the pain of having sinned, after a while the pain would lessen and I would again become enticed, entranced by the lures of lust. I was so weak and so different from these good men described by Alma, I felt I must have been born without some critical element which they had in abundance. What I lacked was the ability to find sin abhorrent *before* I sinned, not *after*!

SEEING THE SCRIPTURES WITH NEW EYES

Just as I shared in Chapter Two that the lies I believed about God affected my ability to interpret the scriptures, so had the lies I believed about myself. For example, because I believed the lie that I was an inferior sort of person, I was blinded to an important lesson taught in the passage from **Alma 13** referred to above. One day, after I started working a Twelve Step program, I read this passage again and saw things I hadn't noticed before. As my brain cleared and my spiritual eyes opened, I saw that these wonderful, righteous brethren, described in the scriptures, *hadn't always been like that*. They had needed repentance too. Alma recorded:

There were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance...choosing to repent

and work righteousness rather than to perish. (Alma 13:10; emphasis added)

These men, who were so righteous they could not look upon sin except with abhorrence, *were once guilty of sins that put them in danger of perishing!*

As I read further, I realized these verses told a story of purification, not perfection. These men were not simply *born* pure, but rather, through their repentance and the Lord's sanctifying influence in their lives, they *became* pure:

Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

Now they, *after* being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments *made* white, being [*after* their repentance] pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were *made* pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:11–12, emphasis added)

Alma was describing the *process* of repentance these men had gone through, and the miracle of their having been made pure and clean by the Savior through the ministering of the Holy Ghost. And then this wonderful invitation in the next verse:

And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest. (Alma 13:13, emphasis added)

This time I read these words with real understanding. What hope and encouragement they contained! *I* could be made clean and become sanctified, or holy, and enter into this same rest. *I wasn't* a different *kind* of person, after all. I had the same potential as these righteous brethren, whom I had respected all these years. If I chose to repent, I could have the same blessings they received. What a liberating thought! What

freedom! What love and goodness our Lord extends to all of His children, even to me! No one is ever excluded from the promises of God.

THE SAVIOR'S INVITATION TO US ALL

As I began to turn away from the lies I had believed, and started accepting the truths the Lord was revealing to me about myself, I saw how deceived I had been to think there was anyone the Savior didn't love enough to die for—including me! After all, I knew men and women right here on earth who made a genuine (and usually successful) attempt to be sympathetic and gracious toward everyone. If they could do that as well as they did, why did I ever imagine that God, the greatest of all, couldn't and wouldn't feel even more kindhearted and patient?

While it is true, according to the scriptures, that at some future time, commonly referred to as “the end of the world,” the Savior will take up His role as the judge of mankind, that time has not yet arrived. In the Gospel of John, which is often referred to as “the gospel of love,” we read this statement by Jesus to his disciples: **“I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47)**. I believe with all my heart that this is still a true description of the Savior's mission. He is still pleading with us to repent, hoping to save us rather than to judge us. Someone once said that when the time finally comes that the Savior must put on the robes of judgment, it will be with tears streaming down His face. I believe that. I think it is impossible for us to fully comprehend the depth of His compassion for us, even in our sins. Consider the story of the woman taken in adultery:

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:10–11)

How kind, how loving was our Savior's response to this woman. Can you imagine a more gentle way than this to counsel someone who had committed the sin that has been called **“most abominable above all**

sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” (Alma 39:5)? The kindness of His reply is profoundly moving to me. It touches me even more to realize that this is the *same* Savior who watches over *me* today. His nature has not changed, and His disposition toward me is no different from His disposition toward this unfortunate woman. He does not minimize the importance of repentance and keeping the commandments, but *He respects the person He corrects*.

On the other hand, we must not assume that because of God’s great love for us, He will or even *could* save us in our sins (Alma 11:37). We must not rationalize or minimize our poor choices. We must realize that unless we repent, our sins will bring terrible heartache and pain to ourselves and to others. Why? Because “**wickedness never was [nor ever will be] happiness**” (Alma 41:10). It might bring numbness for awhile, or maybe distraction, but it can never bring us genuine happiness or joy. *That’s a fact, not a judgment*. As we learned in Chapter Two, even God has to live by such eternal truths.

SEEING OURSELVES AS GOD SEES US: WITH MERCY, HOPE AND LOVE

Psychologists tell us a child does not have the ability to see himself except in the “mirror” others hold up to him. Parents, of course, have a tremendous influence on their children. If the parents express confidence in the child, the child develops confidence in himself. If the parents are critical and demeaning, the child sees himself as deserving criticism and becomes hesitant and insecure. If the parents are forgiving, the child learns he can try new things, even risking mistakes. On the other hand, if the parents are quick to condemn mistakes, the child will fear attempting new things. In time, a parent’s disapproval of a child becomes the child’s own disapproval of himself.

How do any of us mortals, with our limited view of ourselves, come to know who we *really* are? How do we come to accurately assess our own behavior, to trust that we see ourselves correctly? The apostle Paul said:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:11–12)

What a revelation it would be to know ourselves as God knows us. We might be surprised. I certainly was.

As I let go of the lies Satan told me and began to listen to the truth as it was spoken to my heart by the Spirit of the Lord, I found a great sense of joy and even relief. As I continue to trust the Lord, actively seeking and accepting His guidance in my life, I hear His voice reassuring me of His great love for me. We are told **“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy [or revelation]” (Revelation 19:10)**. Perhaps the most important “testimony of Jesus” we need to receive is *His* testimony concerning *us* and our worth to Him.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS CHAPTER

Please take time to answer the following questions in your recovery journal.

1. At this point in your life, how do you see yourself? Get a piece of paper and as fast as you can, fire off a list of adjectives describing yourself. Try to include at least ten—twenty, if you can. (Do this now, before reading the rest of the question.) Now, number them, beginning with the ones that ring the truest to you. What source—negative (the adversary) or positive (the Lord)—do you feel or sense has prompted each of the descriptions on your list?
2. Have you ever felt you were “more powerful to mess up than God is to heal?” Does God think of you differently than He does His other children? Write about how you feel regarding your personal chances for forgiveness.

3. Read of the Savior's kindness toward the woman taken in adultery (**John 8:1–11**). Suppose you were “caught in the act” of practicing your addiction and were taken to Jesus. How would you feel? What do you imagine He would say to you? Can you imagine Him speaking to you as gently as He spoke to this woman? Write some gentle words you feel He might speak to you.
4. Who is the most Christlike person you know? (Pick someone you know well.) Does this person know about your addiction? If yes, how did he or she respond to you when they learned about it? If this person doesn't know yet, how do you imagine they would respond if you told them? Write about what they said or what you can picture them saying to you.
5. If someone came to you and told you they were struggling as you have struggled, would you condemn them? Write a response you might share with this person. Next write about how you have treated yourself. Do you deserve to be treated any worse than you would treat someone else with your problem?