

INTRODUCTION

Uprooting anxiety? Is that possible? Our relationship with anxiety runs so deep that it is hard to imagine being able to reach down far enough to find the deepest of its roots and begin to remove it, but that is what this book is all about. This is an invitation to uproot anxiety, break the thought cycle, and discover the origin of all our lies.

Early one morning, I took a walk along a trail near my home. As I strolled along, I glanced into the woods and was struck by the beauty of a large, deep green bush with plump red berries on it. I had never seen a bush quite like this, and I couldn't resist getting a closer look, so I left the trail to examine it. As I gazed up at the giant leafy shrub, I wondered at its enormous size. At first, it seemed like just one bush, but up close, it was clear there were several bushes growing close together, intertwining with each other's branches. Gleaming in the early morning sun, the crimson berries hung off the limbs in little clusters. There were so many! I doubted the berries were edible, but they looked so inviting. As I moved to get a closer look, my foot caught, and I stumbled on a portion of the root. I stayed there on the ground for some time, staring at that gnarly fibrous root, considering how much of it was underneath the surface. The roots are hidden, but they are the most crucial part of the plant. They sustain it. Those

unseen roots feed and support the bush, allowing it to grow to a tremendous size. I wondered what was underneath this poisonous berry bush.

I'm generally not so inquisitive about nature, but the correlation between a poisonous berry bush and my own thought life seemed so apparent to me. If my thought life is like a poisonous berry bush full of worries and fears, then that means I have my own gnarly fibrous roots that are spoon-feeding me anxiety. These roots are nurturing my worries and supporting my fears. This root system is feeding my thoughts poison. Each poisonous berry on my bush represents a worry or fear that is sustained by lies. There are lots of lies underneath, joining the root system; however, they all feed one big, terrible root that lies beneath, hidden and unacknowledged. This is the lie that lies underneath all our fears. This is the lie that is the origin of all our lies.

This book is the journey I am on, even now, of digging up roots and locating my lie underneath. My journey began many years ago when I read the book *Lies Women Believe* by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth. In it, she uses an illustration about a poisonous berry bush, comparing the berries to the lies women believe. She shares how important it is not just to pick the berries off, but to permanently get rid of them by pulling the bush out from the roots.¹ That image stirred a new curiosity in me. I began seeing my fears as poisonous berries on a dangerous bush and felt compelled to uncover my own berries and dig them out once and for all. The Berry Bush is where I set out on my trek to find a tool that would help me finally take my thoughts captive. Excavating these roots led me to realize that all the lies I had been telling myself came from one source—a lie about the character of God. To stop listening to my lies, I would need to discover the lie beneath my lies.

This is not a self-help book advising you to just stop believing lies and believe in yourself. This is not a book on how to improve your thought life and be more positive. This is a book about God and His character. The goal of this book is to take you, the reader, to the place where you can discover and excavate root lies you are believing about God.

I have written this book for anyone who, like me, understands that we believe lies and wants to stop. We wish we could replace them with truth, but we struggle to know how to do that. I use the word *struggle* because it's truly a wrestling match with yourself and your thought process to figure out how to stop believing the lies and living with the fears they cause. Those fears keep coming back, and the lies continue to have a voice in our heads. I have written this book because after sharing the idea of the Berry Bush with others, many of them tell me that they find freedom using this tool. That is my hope for you. That once you discover your root lie, you will see how it has been nourishing all your poisonous berries. I think of them as barrier berries, they barricade us from complete communion with God. When we realize that these barrier berries are lies, we will comprehend the magnitude of their impact. These barrier berries govern our thoughts, dictating how we feel, how we behave, and what we believe. Once we recognize our barrier berries, we are empowered, and that truth enables us to reach down deep to the lie underneath. Then we can name that root lie, grab it tight, rip it up, and replace it with the root of truth.

We will begin the book by considering how our thoughts affect everything about us: our mood, how we view ourselves, respond to others, and how we perceive the world. My hope is that by the time you finish this book, you'll see that everything in life flows from the truth of God's character. His goodness, trustworthiness, love,

acceptance, and sovereignty will overflow into your thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions. I am trusting God to use this book in your life, opening your eyes and heart to deeper peace and a fuller freedom with Him than you've ever known. I am praying that as you read these pages, God will use the Berry Bush to reveal any barrier that exists between you and Him. I wrote these pages with the expectation that they would provide you with a practical tool to help you identify the lies beneath your fears, expose any unbelief, and destroy whatever barriers that exist between you and God. My prayer is that your thoughts will transform, and you will experience His freedom as you daily live out your Truth Tree.

PART I

**THE LIE
UNDERNEATH**

Chapter 1

THE LIES OF MY FEARS

Not again! I have been here before. I've tried to put this thought out of my head, ignore it, and move on, but here I am once more. My nerves are on edge. My mind is racing. A wave of nausea comes over me. The dread is growing within me, distorting my ability to be rational. My stomach churns. My breathing grows shallow, and irritability courses throughout my body. Without even realizing it, I am allowing that thought to hijack my day, affecting my thoughts, feelings, and actions. It starts small, a voice in my head, an idea, a lie.

I heard a song today that really resonated with me. It is a country song called "Lies of My Fears."¹ It caught my attention when I recognized my own predicament in the singer's story—letting the voice in my head push me around. I turned up the volume as I heard the singer confidently declare that she would not listen to the lies of her fears, and I wondered is it possible not to listen to the lies of my fears? I have tried not to give them any attention, but I continue to struggle. It seems that I am all ears when it comes to the lies of my fears. As I sat in the pew one Sunday morning, listening to another

sermon about lies. I felt as if God was winking and nodding at me to listen up. I am amazed at how He continues to point out the impact of lies on my thought life. From what I see on my phone, listen to, the books I pick up, my conversations with friends, and now one more sermon all are telling me to stop believing lies and replace them with truth. I agree—Yes! I want to change, not worry, and not live in negativity. I want to stop being anxious and just believe. . . . That sounds amazing! But how do I do that? I feel like I am trapped in the movie *Groundhog Day*.² I am re-living my unbelief over and over again each day. I am caught, wanting to believe the truth that I know in my head, but unable to live it out.

I have consumed hundreds of podcasts, audiobooks, and sermons about how to stop believing lies and replace them with truth. They discuss how lies are hidden beneath the surface of our thoughts. They say we need to see how our thoughts are rooted in a lie and then replace that lie with the truth. It sounds so simple, but I continue to wrestle with lies and allow the anxiety they create to distract, disillusion, and disable me. These lies of my fears are pushing me around in my head, and I know it, but knowing they are lies has not caused me to stop ruminating over them, allowing them to affect my thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Can you relate? Are there fears that are pushing you around? Are there lies that are strong-arming your emotions and behavior, compelling you to listen? Are they persuading you to keep thinking about them despite all your efforts to stop believing lies and replace them with the truth?

Many of the resources that I have found, unfortunately, encourage me to consider the lie as an untruth about myself: I am not lovable, I am not good enough, or I do not have what it takes. They say that these are the root lies, but they are not. These are merely surface lies that act as feeder roots, nourishing and sustaining the ugly lie

underneath. This root lie has nothing to do with me and how lovable, good, or capable I am. It is much deeper. The lies of my fears have a bigger, “badder” lie underneath them all, and it has nothing to do with what I believe about myself. It is not a lie about who I am or what I can do. The lie underneath is a lie about God. It is a lie about who He is and what He can do.

This lie affects how we think, feel, and behave. This terrible lie about God does not allow us to live the kind of life that testifies to the greatness of God. Instead, our lives advertise that God is not good. Our anxiousness displays to all that God does not love me. God is not love. Our worry proclaims to everyone that God is not in control. Our lives publicize that God is not trustworthy. We must stop! We cannot continue spreading these lies about God. We need to recognize that the lie underneath is entirely about God. The lie underneath is attacking His attributes, His nature, His character, who He is. The lie is all about how loving, good, and capable God is.

Our Root Lies are Blasphemy

The foundation of my whole belief system is my theology of God; therefore, what I believe about Him will show in the way that I live. As A. W. Tozer recognized in his famous work, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, the most significant fact about any man “is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.”³ In our deep heart, aka the deep roots of our belief system, we answer who God is and what God is like. The Bible tells us God is good, loving, merciful, gracious, and faithful. The gospel message that Jesus Christ died for my sins, conquered death, and is coming again is fundamental to my beliefs. But have I somehow distorted my view of the gospel so that now I am believing

lies—root lies that defame God’s character? These lies that tell me I must work to gain God’s approval; He doesn’t really love me; I have to earn it (Ephesians 2:8–9). These lies that tell me that I need something else besides God to be fulfilled. He isn’t enough (Psalm 34:10). Lies advise me that I deserve a healthy, happy life with no troubles. If God loved me, He would make life easy (Mark 8:34). Lies instruct me to follow my heart, telling me that God does not know what’s best for me, but I do (Jeremiah 17:9). All these lies lead me away from the gospel message and the truth about God’s character. These root lies are causing us to fear, and they are affecting our thoughts and feelings, leading us to behave in ways that continue to reinforce the lies. We need to realize that these anxious, negative thoughts that we allow ourselves to contemplate are based on root lies that we believe about the character of God. Our root lies are those thoughts that we would never speak out loud. Our root lies are blasphemy.

Underneath our fears and negative thoughts, down deep at the bottom, is our root lie about God. To discover what that lie is, we will have to begin excavation at the top, with a berry. Let me introduce you to what I call the Berry Bush. This bush is full of poisonous berries that represent barriers between God and us. These berries are those fears we continue to struggle with and those thoughts that stubbornly refuse to leave us alone. To eliminate these berries, we can’t just pick them off; that won’t work because they keep growing back. We will have to work hard to break up the soil, burrow down deep, and dig until we uncover the lie about God that is underneath. We will excavate it, pulling out the root, recognizing the harm it has caused us and those around us. Then we will plant a Truth Tree with a beautiful root that proclaims God’s goodness, trustworthiness, and love.

I Do Believe! Help Me Overcome My Unbelief

All of us have lies deep within us that keep us from unashamedly jumping into Jesus's arms and living a life of complete faith in His provision, His acceptance, His plan, His goodness, and His love. I was reading in Mark chapter 9, when I saw myself in the father who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus, asking Him to heal his son, saying, "*But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.*" "*If you can?*" said Jesus. "*Everything is possible for one who believes.*" Immediately, the boy's father exclaimed, "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*" (Mark 9:22–24). That is precisely how I feel! I relate to this father's weakness in wanting to believe, but still feel unable to trust completely. This boy's father boldly exclaimed, "*I do believe!*" but then immediately confessed that he needs help with his unbelief. We are exactly the same. We say, "We believe," but we need to ask for help with our unbelief.

Many years ago, my parents gave me a hymnal devotional⁴ for Christmas, and recently, rummaging through a closet looking for something else, I found it in a box full of old memories. I decided to put it out on my nightstand to read through again because I love hymns and the stories of how the hymn came to be, how God impressed these particular words upon each writer's heart. I'm often challenged by their faith and perseverance. This morning, I turned to "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus." I have sung that song a thousand times, but as I sang it today, the last line of the chorus really struck me: "O for grace to trust Him more." Even though He has proved Himself over and over to me, I still need grace to trust Him more.

"Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus. Just to take Him at His word,
Just to rest upon His promise. Just to know, "Thus saith the
Lord"

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him. How I've proved Him o'er
and o'er
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus. O for grace to trust Him more.⁵

This hymn was penned by Louisa Stead. One day, she, her husband, and four-year-old daughter Lilly were at the beach for a picnic when they heard a young boy crying out for help. Her husband rushed to him in the water, but Louisa and Lilly watched helplessly as both Mr. Stead and the boy drowned. After his death, getting by became extremely difficult for Louisa and her daughter. Poverty struck, and they were in dire need. One morning, she woke to find food and money on her doorstep. That same day, she sat down and wrote this hymn.⁶ The lyrics are simple to say, but they are not random rhymes. Stead knew the faithfulness of God. She was certain that He was always with her, true to His promises and offering her rest, joy, and peace. There is nothing superficial in her words. Tragedy had taught her to trust, and through it all, she chose to describe trusting in Jesus as “sweet.” Stead’s testimony displays a different way of responding to unfathomable loss by trusting in Jesus and asking for grace to trust Him more.

This reminds me of another hymn that shares that same sentiment, “It is Well with My Soul” by Horatio Spafford. When the ship sank, and his four daughters drowned on the way to England, he chose to say, “When sorrows like sea billows roll . . . it is well, it is well with my soul.”⁷ To be able to write these words after such a personal tragedy amazes me. When loss hits us, and our equilibrium is struck, lies softly sweep in. Blaming God seems the most plausible answer to our pain. When we feel the loss of our own sense of control, lies begin to make sense to us. We clamor for God to bend to our will.

In Mark 9, as the desperate father looks on his son rolling on the ground, convulsing, and foaming at the mouth, he pleads with Jesus to accept whatever small faith he has, alongside his doubt and fear. Jesus welcomes the father's genuine heart, both his boldness and limitations. This father's attitude of trust is not something that he could conjure up on his own. He needed help, help with his unbelief. He knew he couldn't just dig deeper within himself or pull up his bootstraps and have the necessary faith. He was overwhelmed, despairing, anxious, and willing to admit that he did not believe. We are like him. We want to be self-sufficient and find it inside of us, but faith is a gift from God, who is the author and perfecter of our faith. He knows that we will not find it within ourselves but invites us to find it within Him. Don't beat yourself up for not having enough faith. Instead, ask our generous God who delights in providing what we need. "O for grace to trust Him more," I repeat that last line over and over. It is exactly what my heart cries out. Lord, I want to trust You more and stop believing lies! Give me the grace to trust You more, to recognize these lies, and to discern how they are affecting me.

Listening for Truth

1. Is it possible to not listen to the lies of our fears?
2. What has your journey to stop believing lies been like?
3. Think of a time when you cried out to Jesus, "Help my unbelief!" How did He answer?
4. Where do you need to ask God for grace to trust Him more?

Chapter 2

HOW THE LIE UNDERNEATH IS AFFECTING MY THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND BEHAVIOR

I was in the kitchen washing dishes when my husband, Paul, came to me with a worried expression. He shoved his phone in my face and said, “Look what Bob wrote!” I asked, “Is this Bob our ministry partner?” The text read, “We need to talk. Call me when you have a moment.” My stomach dropped. “What could he want? Why does he want to talk? Paul, do you know?” I asked. I could see the rush of anxiety on Paul’s face, and I felt it too.

Until I read that text, I had been singing along with the radio and happily going about my business, but suddenly, I stood paralyzed with fear. This all happened in an instant. I went from peaceful to a full-fledged storm of emotions. How? My beliefs were affecting my thoughts, and my thoughts were controlling my emotions and actions.

Here I stood clutching a cell phone, anticipating the worst possible scenario, and plotting what to do next. My husband and I were so worried because our finances were a mess. We work for a ministry where we raise money to support our family. We have lots of families and churches who give monthly to be on our team of ministry partners who provide for us so that we can be in full-time ministry. Our account had suffered some hits lately, and it seemed like another one was coming. Now, seeing this text, we expected Bob to share with us that he was leaving our ministry partner team.

What Am I Believing?

For a long while now, God has been teaching me to trust that He will provide for me. I know all the verses that remind us to be strong and not to worry because God is caring for us, but living that out is not always easy. It's one thing to memorize a verse and be able to recite it, but simply knowing it by heart doesn't mean I'm truly practicing it in my daily life. Jesus says, "*Do not be anxious about your life*" (Matthew 6:25 ESV), and in Philippians, Paul instructs us, "*Do not be anxious about anything*" (Philippians 4:6). Although I know these verses, I must not genuinely believe them because if I did, my thoughts would be different. How I feel and how I behave would be different. So, I began to ask myself, what am I believing?

The phone rang. It was Bob. I took a deep breath, trying to remember what Paul and I had rehearsed, how we would answer, and respond. Out of my mouth came a weak greeting. The cordial question of "How are you doing?" brought forth a sarcastic, ugly response in my mind, but thankfully, Paul answered for us. It took a few moments, but soon I realized . . . wait. This is not at all what I expected. He is actually saying he wants to increase his giving! As

the conversation went on, I could hear the gentle whispers of the Holy Spirit reminding me that He has me in His hand. He will provide for me. He loves me. We hung up the phone and got on our knees, repenting (once again) of our unbelief and worshiping Him for His lavish love. I could barely utter, “God, why do I continue to doubt you? You tell me in Your Word over and over that You will take care of me, that You will provide for me. You show me time and time again that You love me, but still, I do not truly believe You.”

Our Thoughts, Emotions, and Behavior

My thoughts affect how I act. My thoughts were filled with worry and fret over finances. I behaved as if I were someone who had never heard the words of Jesus, promising me that as He watches over the sparrows, how much more will He care for me. In fact, He has the hairs of my head numbered and reminds me time and again not to be afraid (Matthew 10:29–31). I don’t know if you can relate, but I think you can. I think that probably you are a lot like me. You know all the Bible verses. You have stood up and publicly shared with others about God’s faithfulness in your life. But then something happens, and you forget. You say that you believe, but your thoughts, emotions, and behavior do not agree. Your thoughts, emotions, and behavior do not testify of God’s faithfulness.

Our thoughts impact how we feel, and those feelings influence how we act. Our emotions and behaviors will reinforce what we think. Before you know it, we are going in circles and have gotten ourselves in a real repetitive cycle because our emotions and behavior reinforce our thinking patterns. This cycle is a key focus area of a mental health treatment approach called Cognitive Behavioral

Therapy, which is discussed in *The Lies We Believe* by Chris Thurman.¹ It is a practical method of psychotherapy that helps with anxiety. It purports that the way we think affects our mood, which in turn affects our behavior, and these three reinforce our beliefs, which start the cycle all over again. By identifying and challenging our core beliefs, we can interrupt the cycle. This is the repeated pattern that our thoughts follow:²

My thoughts	Affect	→	How I feel
How I feel	Influences	→	My behavior
My behavior	Reinforces	→	What I believe
What I believe	Impacts	→	My thoughts

Ruts

Have you ever gotten your car stuck in the mud? I grew up in a small town in Texas in the country where the dirt roads can develop some deep ruts after a good rain. My family lived in a doublewide trailer about a mile off the main road on a typical dirt road. It was often full of ruts. I remember as a new teenage driver trying so hard to stay out of them, but ultimately falling in with a thud, cursed to follow along the way of the furrowed groove with no option of escape for several stretches of road (even when I needed to turn left to get to my friend's house). When I think about those ruts, I think about my thought cycle and how the more I consider a lie and reinforce it through my actions, the deeper the rut I am making. As I ruminate over that lie, allowing it to affect my feelings and behaving as if I believe it, eventually I do. That is why I act like I don't believe that God will take care of me the way that He takes care of the sparrows. Because I created the lie, I let it lead my thoughts down into a deep,

furrowed groove that carries me along and reinforces my wrong beliefs. From then on, whenever that thought comes into my head, it will continue to broaden the expanse of the rut, making it wider and deeper each time.

In my childhood, I remember looking out my bedroom window after the rain had stopped. The sun emerged. The dirt road was just slightly damp, slowly hardening as the sunrays stiffened the soil. In the distance, the sound of a deep diesel engine rumbled. A pickup truck with a grader attached to the back of it appeared on our dirt road. Behind it, the truck dragged a wide, heavy grader that smoothed out the ruts. Back and forth it would drive down our road, making several passes to ensure that they were gone and that the road was level again. I was grateful because I would not fall into those tracks again, and I could easily turn left and drive to my friend's house without any trouble. Those ruts are such a visual depiction of how my thoughts can get me stuck. The more I ruminate on a berry thought, the bigger the gap. My thoughts careen into the crevice with a thud, cursed to stay in that groove and follow along the way of the rut with my mind, body, and mood pulled toward the deeper part of it. This is more than just a groove affecting my thoughts and feelings; it impacts my beliefs, causing me to contradict myself and not live in the peace that Jesus says He has given me (John 14:27). However, there is more to this illustration because here come those trucks dragging graders behind them to eliminate the ruts! This book will show you a way to bring the pickup trucks with the graders to your mind and level out the furrowed grooves that are full of poisonous berries.

OK, obviously, I am not a neuroscientist, and this illustration can only go so far because our neural pathways are more complex than ruts in a road, but it has helped me to realize that my thoughts

are not just benign ideas that flit and float in and out of my brain. They do affect everything—my mind, attitude, and comportment. Those thoughts that I ruminate on will not only affect my mood and conduct, but ultimately what I believe, by creating an easy path for my thoughts to continue down each time. Neurosurgeon Dr. Lee Warren explains that “when you think about something enough times from a particular point of view, you create ruts and synapses in your brain that automate those thoughts and make it easier for them to perpetuate.”³ He points out that every day we have thousands of automatic thoughts, of which many are not true. When we repeatedly have negative thoughts and behaviors, we create a neural pathway in our brain, and each time it makes it easier for our mind to go that way, creating a rut and ultimately reinforcing the lie. We are stuck in the cycle of fearful thoughts, burdened feelings, and agitated behavior.

Once we understand this thought cycle and its impact, we will recognize that our thoughts really do affect everything. It is time that we seriously consider what we allow ourselves to reflect on. Because those ideas that roll around in our head don't ask for permission to stay, they simply continue rolling around, impacting us. They will have a say in how we feel, and those emotions will influence our behavior. Unfortunately, we will continue in this cycle with those same fears occupying our thought life, influencing our emotions, and affecting our behavior. These are the poisonous berries growing on your Berry Bush. These poisonous berries are affecting everything! How did we get into this predicament? What started this vicious thought cycle? Let's go back to the beginning and learn, as Eve did, that it all begins with a lie about God.

Listening for Truth

1. Consider any disparity between what you know in your heart and what your thoughts, emotions, and behavior show. If someone could eavesdrop on your thoughts, what would they hear?
2. Think about an experience where you behaved as if you had never heard of Jesus's care for the sparrows and for you. What were you thinking and feeling?
3. Look back at the image of the thought cycle and consider how your thoughts are affecting your feelings and behavior. What kind of thoughts seem to be recurring and affecting you the most?
4. Name a thought that is creating a rut in your mind. Now imagine a truck and grader coming to level out that rut.