

**DISMANTLING
THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF
GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN
SO LOVE CAN THRIVE**

RENE LAFAUT, MSc.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Copyright © 2017 Rene Lafaut

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 987-1978187157

ISBN-13: 978-1978187153

DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this book to my beloved wife Sophie who felt the brunt of my learning process through my psychosis as I arrived at the contents found in this book and learned to grow in tangible love.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

1	Introduction	1
2	The Methodology	8
3	The Power of the Sin Nature vs. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within	21
4	How I've learnt to Dismantle the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within Me	27
5	Expanding My Understanding On How To Dismantle the Unwanted Tree Within Me	49
6	Explaining & Healing Fear	56
7	Explaining & Healing Pride	72
8	Explaining & Healing the Lust Branches of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Me	84
9	Explaining & Healing My Coveting Branches of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within	99
10	Summarizing How I Dismantled the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within My Life	115
11	Applying the Methodology Learned to some Examples in My Life	118
12	Enter the Tree of Life	138
13	Conclusion	141
14	Further Reading	143

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to acknowledge my family and friends for believing in me as I arrived at the content found in this book.

1 INTRODUCTION

This book, manual, or map is written in response to questions I had accumulated over the years as I struggled with sin strongholds (those things that go against self-love, people-love, and God-love that I was powerless to change all by myself) that I wanted gone. I confessed my struggles to spiritual directors, priests, and those I trusted with my baggage over many years, but none had the necessary experience to fully deal with my issues or had lived with as hard a heart or confused mind like I had. They had never walked in my shoes. Yet, I was open to the wisdom that came my way and this helped me to navigate life until the contents of this book were slowly revealed to, understood by, and successfully administered to me in prayer.

Ultimately, I landed up embracing God, my Bible and input from the body of Christ¹; and decided to let them speak to me. I did not have immediate revelations that answered all my questions all at once. But I began to journey with God with Him using triggers such as uncomfortable circumstance, and awkward moments I had with people, to show me what was in my heart so that we could work on cleaning up my life from the inside out with His guidance.

The Gospel's invitation to its hearers is to repent and believe in Jesus. However, the word "repent" is often misunderstood by those outside and inside the church because of so much hypocrisy and powerlessness to make it real. The "how to do this part" of repentance is not well understood and very confusing to many people who struggle with bad habits and sin strongholds that bring guilt and shame besides powerlessness and condemnation from spectators.

Personally, I began to discover that my vocabulary, understanding, and practice of the Christian basics was weak and that led to me searching for and getting revelations on "how to repent" from my strongholds of sin, my addictive behaviors, and how to change my negative unloving attitudes to become a more positive person with Jesus' help (grace), promises, teachings and truth found in the Scriptures. I started to learn how to process my emotions and baggage within and learned how to navigate my conflicts more healthily. The "how to do this part" was not immediately obvious to me for the longest time even though I was a serious Christian who had gone through many serious trials without losing my faith.

Having said this, many people accept that in this life, they will never go to church with everything right in their souls, that they have supposedly arrived, that they got the package or are the correct package, or keep all the rules; nor do they suppose that anyone belongs for such reasons. None of us are the package: only Jesus is. Fact is, we sin, sometimes grossly, sometimes

¹ Cf. Chapter 14 for those authors whose books helped to point me in healthy directions so I could eventually enter more deeply into the healing process that Jesus was leading me through.

repeatedly. If one is honest, one realizes that even with cleaning up the outside, there are often many unresolved issues or sin habits that we likely don't have the desire, commitment, energy or know how to overcome. And we often come to accept that we will focus on one or two issues in our life times because we don't know how to start cleaning up even a little of the stuff in our hearts that we feel guilty about, because we don't understand what is happening in our hearts that causes us to sin habitually.

I am learning to conquer together with Jesus many of the sin strongholds in my life through His promises, teachings, commands, authority, power (grace), truths, and presence; and I want to share the outline on how I am experiencing this process, with the reader. Having said this, I am a sinner and I go for grace when receiving communion, I don't earn it by being in a state of grace. Being in a state of grace is good, but confessing sin and working on repentance so love will blossom is more important to God than supposedly being prepared to receive communion because one is abstaining from all (or, is it most?) visible sins just prior to communion. A thorough cleaning job is better than cosmetic changes in most people's eyes; I think God agrees. However, I think that if I can repent from serious sin, I should do so to restore me to a state of grace.

I need to say that the invitation from God that I accepted to change for spiritual relational-health reasons written about in this book isn't based on deep mysteries, or complex doctrines, but on the basic teachings of the Good News of Jesus Christ that was forgotten by me soon after conversion, discounted as "that is too easy to be true" and later jettisoned as only being important for "baby-Christians". The reason I didn't make progress for a long time and didn't grow into maturity as a Christian is because I thought I knew better and had moved onto greener pastures. Real change comes slowly and only comes to those who don't give up, who do search for how to care for and love people, and don't discount or despise the simplicity of the Good News as taught by Jesus in the Gospels.

There is a lot of theology in this book that I use to support my take on how I've learned to repent. It should not be looked at as a system, or set of laws that supposedly need to be conformed to for there to be freedom. Freedom only comes from abiding in Jesus and He let's us know, when we are listening, what needs to be believed and practiced. No finite set of rules, principles, laws, or code is enough to solve all our problems, and this applies to this book. Rules create pressure not freedom, but healthy relationships do create freedom. So, if God speaks to you in some context through this book embrace it when it happens in a healthy way as you become aware of the limitations and benefits of the revealed truth, but the focus should always be on what Jesus is showing.

As with all books that talk about the possibility of good change, there is a warning with this one. When I have been set free by a truth and grace in an area that may have plagued me for

decades, the impulse has been often to carry the truth to an extreme, forget about grace, get proud, and start to judge and hurt people because of my twisted slant on things. Church history unfortunately has witnessed many clergy trying to “muzzle truths” that “seem dangerous” and “threatening” to them or the status quo. Whatever the place of shepherds in the church is, and they do have a place, if one can't embrace truth one embraces fear and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in my opinion. When I personally encounter a new truth I usually don't grasp all of its aspects or properties immediately and need to wrestle with it until I understand its limitations, and its freeing power through grace. I need the freedom to make mistakes and that means sometimes taking things too far. Without this freedom to make mistakes I just wouldn't learn and grow in the freedom to love or mature like I have.

The Gospel of John says Jesus is full of grace and truth. I have learned that I need Jesus and the grace and truth He offers if I want my sin strongholds structure to lose its power and to be dismantled.

The sin strongholds I speak about in this book made up an ugly structure erected in my heart for a very long time, and can fittingly be called “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within, and needed to be replaced with LOVE. I have learned some tools to do just that in this book. “The tree of knowledge of good and evil” is a structure made from commitments to beliefs and expectations based on lies, guilt, and fears rooted in broken-relationship-wounds that negatively impact our relational lives.

The three-major-categories of sin: unhealthily seeking power, seeking sex, and seeking money characterize “the tree of knowledge of good and evil's” building blocks of “resentments, fear and pride”, its branches of “lust, sloth, and gluttony,” and its branches of “coveting judging and greed” respectively, and are commonly revealed to us in broken relationships, business-dealings, wars, history, the news, TV, radio, Internet, movies, magazines, or read about in books. In rejecting God, we seek power to carry out our plans to survive and to make a name for ourselves just like those who built the Tower of Babel as is recorded in the book of Genesis. Just as many people in the church are busy growing this hideous tree structure within themselves as those outside of the church. We are all fallen.

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” within consists of a dark energy flowing and giving life to a connected structure that is comprised of the building blocks of resentments, fears, pride, coveting, judgmentalism, greed, lust, sloth, and gluttony and many other hideous attitudes and bad fruit. It needs to be dismantled for love to thrive.

Here is an overview of this book:

- Chapter one, Introduction.

- Chapter two, I give a description or outline of the methodology God gave me so I could enter a deeper transforming-friendship-with-Him like He promised me a long time ago. This chapter shows what I learned to expect from God and what energy and humility is needed for real change.
- Chapter three, I talk about the power of the “sin nature” vs. “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me, and how they differ on their impact in my life. Understanding this helps me to choose my battles wisely.
- Chapter four, I start to describe how I’ve learned to dismantle “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me, give what key Scriptures are used to drive the methodology, and give some definitions of Christian jargon that make transformation possible in this life. Without them little but cosmetic change is possible. In the next five-chapters I attempt to show the connections between the different parts belonging to “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” which is intended to help us pray through them more thoroughly and help to dismantle them in the different contexts of our lives:
- Chapter five, I expand my discussion on the process of transformation, by talking about broken relationships and our search for peace in the wrong places which is where “the tree of knowledge of good and evil’s” life deceptively comes from.
- Chapter six, I explain how to heal fear and its related vices which are a part of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” I talk about healing self-pity, worry, pressure, cowardice, and conceit which are all ingredients that get the tree to grow wildly.
- Chapter seven, I explain how to kill the stronghold of pride from the tree, and grow humility instead. Deeply renewing the mind with healthy strategic truths and thinking is key to stopping the tree’s growth. Arrogance, pressure, and using force are also related ingredients that get this tree to grow wildly.
- Chapter eight, I explain how I kill my lust and the related vices of sloth and gluttony from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” and how to grow healthy habits instead.
- Chapter nine, I explain how to kill my coveting, envy, jealousy and related vices such as judging, anger, addictions, moral policing, greed, and selfishness from the “tree of knowledge on good and evil” and how to grow kindness and generosity instead.
- Chapter ten, I summarize what was discussed in the previous chapters and deal with some trouble shooting tips when I get stuck.
- Chapter eleven, I give five successful personal examples of how to work and pray so certain parts of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” are dismantled within me.
- Chapter twelve, I present an alternative tree to replace “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” whose source is God and is accessed through a humble faith relationship through His Son: Jesus.
- Chapter thirteen, Conclusion.

There are many graphic and coarse examples of strongholds found in this book. They are brutal, ugly, selfish, proud, arrogant, hostile, mean, hurtful, and often angry. And, they are mine, seeded through unhealthy beliefs that grew in time only to find their way into my subconscious

as I foolishly tried to suppress the baggage and not healthily process any of it.

Whenever I believed a devil's lie about myself and the people I knew in many contexts over the years of being hurt, a huge mess resulted in my interior and relational life. I landed up stuffing the bad energy that came from inside of me and I kept believing the devil's lies for years because I really didn't know how to wash away what was inside of me, even though I didn't want this bad energy in my life. I was just too blind on how to get healed, but I "really" wanted the healing. I did not like my lack of love and I did not know what to do about it until God gave me the keys found in this book. Lies usually sound good to us when we believe them, but the consequences of doing so are often horrible. Lies always have catches.

Words of caution:

- 1) I did not find any healing when I isolated myself and put my own needs selfishly before others. The parable of the Good Samaritan has a priest who cares more about his spiritual state than a wounded person on the side of the road. When I care more about "not sinning", than "loving the people" in my life, then I won't grow in loving people through God's grace. The way to healing is to seek to love and that means putting people before concepts and other idols. Seeking to love, and not waiting till I'm healthy enough, or until it is easier to love is the path to growing in love. Seeing the difficulties and obstacles as my place, my work bench, and my classroom to learn to love is wise!
- 2) I don't produce good fruit, but I bear it to use the True-Vine analogy from John 15. All the virtues, goodness, love, compassion, mercy, and grace that comes out of me is a result of the Holy Spirit. He performs His work through me. I am an instrument God uses. God told me that He was digging tunnels of love within me a long time ago, that means that when I love the Holy Spirit lives in me, and uses me as His instrument of love. God gets the glory.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.²

Admitting that I am God's instrument is what honest pride acknowledges. It concedes that God is the Author, Mastermind, Life-giver, and Peace-Giver that is responsible for whatever good comes out of me. When Paul says that "we no longer live" he means we no longer live according to the flesh or "sin nature", but we are now dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

- 3) Focusing primarily on Jesus' presence, grace, and secondarily on little "t"-truths brings the most stability in navigating life's obstacles to love because they keep me from using anger and self-pity for selfish reasons.
- 4) I realized that I can't assume that doing things that require effort will always become

² Galatians 2:20

easy through prayers, and that by coasting through life I can do God's will. Going by my feelings (to feel good alone) in this context is never a good idea when it comes to living my life healthily, practicing self-control, doing acts of love, and working in a useful manner. If I do abandon effort, initiative, and caring and instead coast (seeking pleasure), then I negate the useful strategies found in this book, and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" will not die, and the "flesh or sin nature" helps to strengthen this tree's domination over our relationships.

All sin strongholds are very immature, self-centered, and self-pitying. The way for me to progress has been to uproot my bad attitudes by giving up the lies and immature beliefs behind them that I had incorporated into my life- thinking- belief- personality- character- and action-structure within. I couldn't take giant leaps to maturity over night: "Rome was not built in a day". Rather I realized that each lesson needs to be fully mastered, savored, understood, and put into practice by me for progress to be made so that eventually what Saint Paul said:

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.³

comes true in my life. "God comforts me, consoles me, refreshes me but He does not want me to become stuck with Him forever changing my diapers, so He wisely puts challenges or things that bring discomfort in my path to urge me forward to growth so my path doesn't become stagnant."⁴

Sometimes...we can have very valid concerns...but the methodology to stand up for them or to carry them out can be very unhealthy. The mode in which we attempt to carry out good causes can either be childish, or mature. It can be done crudely, meanly, angrily, in self-pity, and be demanded...this all needs to be jettisoned, and the valid concerns still need to be embraced but with gentleness, respect, kindness, honor, peace, and acceptance that we can't demand things to always go our way. Instead we submit in kindness, letting the truth speak up for itself.

Even when we have a good cause we can meanly, judgmentally, proudly intolerantly go about developing and carrying out our cause. This needs to be repented from.

One might notice that in starting to read this book, that you may begin to feel more judgmental in some ways. If this is the case, then the book is triggering in you what has only been hidden from you in your heart and mind up until now. As one perseveres in applying the principles found in this book, eventually what is in you that gets triggered will be washed away with Jesus' grace and truth, and you will become more tolerant, compassionate, caring, and loving towards the people in your life. So don't give up reading and applying this book to your life for

³ 1 Corinthians 13:11

⁴ This thought comes from my friend Mark Munn

your reward is very great.

The book of James in chapter 3, says, and I paraphrase: “where the tongue goes, the body follows suit.” I'm pained at just how true this has been in my life about negative stuff. When I seek to control situations or people I use my tongue. By the tongue, I judge what is pleasurable, and by the tongue I hurt people. It will be shown that "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within me is heavily influenced by how I use my tongue. Lies spring from my tongue, and lies did cause this tree to grow stronger and more twisted within me over time; and helped me to become more hurtful in how I related to others. My tongue speaks from the abundance of what is stored in my heart either for good or for evil. What is stored in my heart are my beliefs, desires, and commitments; and I often land up believing what I carelessly speak.

It is fitting then, that through the tongue in prayer, this unhealthy “tree of knowledge of good and evil” structure within can be dismantled with God's help.

2 THE METHODOLOGY

Having a vocabulary for unwholesome inner emotions/ attitudes/ and energy is very important to being able to diagnose, pray more strategically, and to destroy the sin-strongholds or “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me. I have developed such a vocabulary in this book. I know that I have had “really” bad energy within me often, and the vocabulary in this book has helped me to process and deal with it in healthy ways.

Also, there have been repeated times when my energy has been so bad, with me not knowing where it came from, that to deal with it I had to pray asking the Holy Spirit to heal my mind. This was a measure that got me sane enough to deal with other stuff...but I had to persevere until I was completely connected to the energy/ attitude and was able to see the lie and pride I held onto, and so was able to be set free by Jesus’ truth and grace.

To annihilate all the “flesh” or to kill the pull towards sin completely in this life is not possible. I can with Jesus’ help, destroy the strongholds of bad attitudes within me though, because these are different from the “flesh”, but I will always have the flesh to deal with in this life. It’s natural to feel, experience, and agree with the “flesh” to some degree when confronted with stuff I do not expect or when others make requests I have not counted on. Trying to kill it “all” is not wise, is very unhealthy, and comes from a perfectionistic mindset. Perfectionism should not be worshipped. It is unhealthy to want to be too righteous. When I expect too much from myself I will expect it too much from others and make their lives as miserable as mine.

Canonized “Saints” were never perfect spiritually in this life. They are often entrepreneurs, or clear thinkers in certain areas of spirituality that the hierarchy and certain segments of the church esteemed. They were very developed in one or two areas, but not so in all other aspects of life. I thought I was advanced spiritually until I got married. Watching movies about people who were canonized gives me the impression of blandness, dryness, misguided idealism, and wrongly putting people on pedestals. These “Saints” are special but no more than anyone else. Aiming to be perfect like these people “supposedly” were, is not wise. We need balance. I struggled with a BIG stronghold of pride, and the tools in this book together with my relationship with God helped dismantle much of it. But I don't expect to kill the “flesh” outright in this life. When I pretend the sinful nature does not exist, it comes back to bite me.

When calamity, chaos, or trauma occur, then we all have different reactions. Some reactions go really deep, whereas others are shallower. Some feel numb, others feel deeply for those involved, others have waves of sadness, others feel uncomfortable, and others feel seething anger. Whatever the reaction in any particular person, unconditional love respects the person, doesn't judge their reaction, and does not condemn them because that is what love is.

A long time ago I was made aware of this promise:

God grants His grace to the Humble,
but opposes the proud.⁵

It is found in both the Old and New Testaments. By itself, if I do not know my own pride, and what healthy humility looks like, then this promise won't bear any good fruit in my life. But if I know what pride looks like inside of me, and what true humility is (and how to get humbler), then I will have a chance to milk this verse for more grace (God's empowering presence). I went through years of not knowing my own pride, and the little I saw I did not know how to mortify, and landed up stuffing most of it. But when I started to seriously pray for humility and started to search for wisdom that could Kill the stronghold of pride, then God started to give me revelations, and I started to see victories in my battles against my pride. This book is the result of that search.

The place of the commandments of Jesus and their relationship to the Old Testament (OT) Law play a huge role in having victory in the battles against the strongholds of pride and related vices or attitudes. The OT Law was a minimum standard of behavior between one another, and between humankind and God. The commands of Jesus are higher than the OT Law and are altruistic in nature and submitting to Jesus' commands in grace will inevitably help us to fulfill the OT Law. The OT Law is very passive, and negative in nature compared to the teachings and commands from Jesus found in the New Testament (NT) Scriptures. Focusing on the high goal of love: "to do to others what we would want done to us" is key to victory. Too often the "thou shall not" - Laws found in the OT are reacted to with "what is in it for us?", or with rebellion and the desire to do the opposite.

When Jesus says that the Ten Commandments still stand, (cf. Matthew 5:17) He is not saying we are under LAW (we are under grace), but that these commandments are still to be used to point out sin. We don't trust in the Ten Commandments to somehow keep them. No, we aim higher than these Commandments like the teachings of Jesus and Sermon on the Mount outline. In aiming higher, the minimum OT standard will be fulfilled through supernatural love prompted through caring and the grace poured out through faith in the person of Jesus.

The OT Law said to not steal or covet; Jesus said to give freely to the poor. The OT Law said don't murder; Jesus said to love our enemies. The OT Law said to sacrifice cattle, bulls and sheep to God; Jesus called us to be living sacrifices. The OT Law said to commit no adultery; Jesus says to love our spouses as ourselves. The OT Law said to not worship lifeless idols, Jesus invited us to true life for free. The OT Law said to honor our parents; Jesus said to take them into our homes, help them, and care for them. The OT Law said to not work on the Sabbath; Jesus said it is

⁵ James 4:6

healthy to do good on the Sabbath. The OT Law said not to use the Lord's Name in vain; Jesus says we get to call God our Father. The OT Law said, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth", but Jesus said use non-violence to spread love. The OT Law said bear no false witnesses; Jesus said to speak the truth in love, believe the best about people, and not to judge or condemn people. The OT Law said to give a percentage; whereas Jesus asks us to be generous just like He is.

Holding onto Laws, to somehow let them save me from sin, inevitably sucks the life, breathe, energy, and joy out of me. However, little "t"-truths set me free like medicines, but if I hold onto these truths too tightly, rigidly and religiously they too also start to suck the life out of me. I only need the BIG "T"-Truth: Jesus Christ; who will supply the right little "t"-truths at the right times with the right touch and energy, when I am listening for them, and open to His grace.

So, any commandment given by Jesus, that seems grossly unfair to me, must not be carried about like a burdensome negative weight, but instead I choose to trust Jesus, that He will help me carry it out at the appropriate times. My faith is in Jesus saving me, not in Laws saving me, no matter how good the Laws are. I love because I care, not so much because I execute Laws.

The Law was made for those who sin...by that I mean the Law only points out our sins. The Law can't save us from our sins. Jesus came to save us from our sins.

Once I get healthy in an area because the corresponding little "t"-truth has done its job, then I don't need to focus on it anymore until I need it again. I don't keep taking a certain cough medicine when I no longer have a cold. So, my focus and attention ought to be redirected to Jesus and His grace not the little "t"-truths that have set me free in certain areas.

It is about the grace giver, and His grace flows into me naturally if I don't block it with my pride. And if I don't block it, then it will flow into my life and, also out of me into all those people I am called to love: both friends and enemies.

When I see things, and have wonderful insights it has been too easy to get preachy. I know that many times God has spoken to me indirectly through people, but often it does not clue into my mind immediately that what was spoken applies to me. I think this true of others too. The Holy Spirit is a far better convincer about sin than we are. He does not do so to make us feel judged, and remain guilty, shamed and condemned, but to have a change of heart, and to joyously go our way thereafter. Correcting people when we have wood in our eyes (think: our consciences) is hypocritical, un loving, hurtful, and proud and should be abandoned. Thankfully, God loves us so much that He does all in His power to convince us to choose healthy attitudes instead. We are not moral policemen.

When I pray, "God, please help 'so and so' be MORE LIKE ME in this area of love or humility" I am being proud and judgmental. I ought not compare and put others down and attempt to raise

myself up in prayer or out of it. No one has arrived. When I do grow in love and humility I give glory to God. Let me not pretend that I am a paragon of virtue, have it all together, and am a master of virtue.

We all have gaps in our thinking, reasoning, understanding, and philosophies; and we all fall short in our actions to love and be completely humble in every area of our lives. All of us to some degree major on minor issues, and we all minor on some major issues. We skip over stuff that ought to be done when people are not looking because we think we can get away with it. We cannot judge or condemn other people; the Sermon on the Mount teaches⁶ us to not judge or condemn others no matter how informed we think we are.

The tools outlined in this book are basic (but not always easy to apply). Using them in relationship with Jesus through prayer is slowly making me spiritually healthy. And I ought not think I have mastered humility once a victory or string of victories is achieved.

When the Bible calls for intense-accurate-honest-confession-prayer it is not asking the child of God to view God's throne room as a COURT-OF-LAW. It is asking us to look at His throne room as a family room. The difference is that the LAW-MENTALITY-ATMOSPHERE deals with not wanting to go to Hell (which can be a very selfish preoccupation for some), whereas the FAMILY-ROOM-ATMOSPHERE-ATTITUDE has to do with admitting how we hurt people, did wrong to them, upset God, but more than that: it is where we seek healing in our attitudes/ character/ hurts/ relationships, and where we want forgiveness in our lives and for those who did the hurting. This isn't done to bring about shame/ humiliation/ fear/ self-pity/ anger/ judgmentalism/ or condemnation but is diagnostic in nature and is meant to bring healing to self-wounds and relationship-wounds through God's grace and loving touch. LAW-stuff does not do this. LAW stuff just cares whether you are guilty or not and what your sentence or penance will be.

The LAW-approach seems only concerned about heaven and hell whereas the GRACE-approach does that but much more. Grace is into restorative justice like healing in the here and now of the hurting self, broken relationships and hurting people. Grace is more holistic and closer to the Father heart of God. God is not a cold judge but a warm restorer.

The Law-approach has no humor, joy, joking, freshness, life, imagination, and creativity associated with it because it is only concerned about the outcome. The grace-approach does embrace humor, joy, warmth, joking, freshness, life, imagination, and creativity, because it is not a "heaven vs. hell" battle but an "unhealthy approach vs. a healthy approach" battle to life. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus⁷. The way I talk to God is the way I will talk

⁶ Cf. Matthew 7:1-6

⁷ Cf. Romans 8:1

with others. So, changing my attitudes in prayer will give deeper intimacy with God as well as more warmth towards people.

The process of transformation is like this: first the promise, then times of preparation, then life gradually gets more difficult, frustrating, counter intuitive to the point where the difficulty is so extreme that it seems absurd that things will change, that the promise won't come through, and things just seem so unfair that demons lie to us saying "God isn't good". Eventually self-pity can become an option, and if indulged in and not repented from can rob one of the blessings that are promised. In some cases, people jettison their faith because the wait is too long, and that is "really" sad! But when we come to understand and master our self-pity through grace and truth, we will inherit the promises.

Pain by itself does not make one humble or heal one. When pain is with us, our reactions to it can be negative, poor-me, bitter, proud-envious, self-pitying (that can lead to demanding), being judgmental, angry, hostile, rebellious, hateful, and resentful with cries of unfairness. But God can use pain to prepare us for healing if we choose to humble ourselves in its presence.

It is faith in Jesus that brings spiritual healing and cleansing from sins through spiritual medicines and it is faith that helps me get through the pain that accompanies the surgery He wants to perform on me. I just need to know how to access the medicines and I do so through praying God's promises found in Holy Scripture in strategic ways by not letting self-pity rob me of the treasures awaiting me.

Truth sets people free. Jesus is our Savior, not pain. Pain can alert us to the need of a Savior. Pain happens when Jesus pokes around to bring spiritual healing. But it is the Savior of the world: Jesus, who heals, forgives and cleanses us, not necessarily the pain! It is how we navigate the pain that can bring blessings. Let's not give up when seeking spiritual healing! It starts with prayer that says God is good and a rewarder of those who seek Him. Seeking God with a demanding spirit that stems from self-pity is unhealthy, but seeking God to get rid of self-pity is healthy.

I view the principles, promises and truths in this book as prescriptions and medicines to get me healthy. I try to be serious about them, try to understand them, but to not forget the face of Jesus, His warmth, kindness, grace, patience, love, compassion, and tears (joy and sadness). He is with me all the way. Keeping my sense of humor has been very important. There is joy in the journey.

It is so easy to acquire sour attitudes, but wholesome ones seem so much harder to get. But I am the only one who can change my attitudes with Jesus' help once I understand what their functions are.

The journey to wholeness is a marathon, not a sprint. There are periods where we encounter all

sorts of chaos, pain, random acts, senseless suffering, and generally stuff that confuses us, and makes us question the goodness of God and these can trigger a reaction from us of self-pity. Only by focusing on the goal, and focusing on the grace, truths, and promises of God will we be able to make it through the mess. Without a goal, or a healthy focus we are more open to the lies of the devil who will do whatever is in his power to torment us, draw us away, drive us away from the straight and narrow path before us, and neutralize us.

The methods I use to repent and renew my mind in this book are dogmatically systematic, and can be looked at as cold algorithms, but I refuse to look at them and follow them that way. Staying open to the Holy Trinity speaking to me, and not trying to conform to cold methods is where I have had the most success. I look at the principles in this book as medicines that bring healing, but they all have limitations.

All the giants [or attitudes] such as: fear, pride, coveting, envy, lust, sloth, gluttony, greed, selfishness, judging...etc. promise stuff they can't give me. Even though they are my enemies, I find myself agreeing with them when it is convenient. Undoing the "lies" the devils promise through them is key to winning the battles and requires renewing my mind. Fighting off temptation, and seeking for/ searching for keys to make progress, and not letting things get me bogged down is important to the day to day process of not stagnating. Killing the giants of self-pity (that can lead to ugly demanding), bitterness, conceit, resentments, jealousy, and anger helps us to win and occupy the Promised Land.

Truth is so very important. Saying certain ideas/ stories/ imaginations from the world that people see as truth that are lies aren't unhealthy or don't matter is unwise. That does not mean that I ought to go around trying to correct people, who haven't asked for my advice, when they assert stuff that the Bible says is unhealthy. I need to use healthy wisdom and be non-judgmental in my relating style.

In this book, very specific categories of sin will be pointed out within me that make up the roots, branches, and fruits of the old life: "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" that will be shown to be connected. Being able to pray through them to God in logical and systematic ways did help to dismantle this old structure, and did help to establish new outlets for grace to bear love in my relational life.

When I do confess my sins to God as part of the processes described in this book, I have found from experience that the peace granted through forgiveness ought "really" be savored, reflected on, appreciated, and accepted as gifts made possible because of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. This gift of peace stabilizes me, calms me down, and allows God's grace to flow through me more perfectly. So, I don't rush or intellectualize the process of being forgiven because God's felt presence is very real. In following this wisdom, I eventually got in touch with

the joy of my salvation. I strongly encourage the reader to not abandon the emotional aspects when asked by God to confess one's sins to Him.

Generally, the process of inner-transformation, described in this book, involves the following Principles that I practice daily in most of my affairs:

- 1) Pursue a relationship with God through grace and faith in Jesus Christ in a humble and teachable fashion,
- 2) Refuse to wallow in self-pity, "poor me"- thinking, and believing God is unfair. Refuse to attack and judge God when things seem upside down. Choose to trust God no matter what.
- 3) Ceaselessly pray [will define this] (this enables me to find my bearings and journey with God),
- 4) Ask the Holy Spirit to heal my mind and heart regularly and when in distress,
- 5) Give up pretending that I don't have the wounds I have, i.e. be honest and choose to humble myself,
- 6) Stop doing it all by myself, stop pushing bad-stuff down or shoving it under the carpet, but renew my mind and heart [as per working definitions given later] to process my feelings and baggage to move me away from judging, bad heart habits and harmful thought patterns, to truth telling, caring with healthy thinking, believing and actions,
- 7) Become aware of the connections between my sins, bad attitudes, stronghold sins, and behaviors and link them together as certain structures as suggested in this book via "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" diagram to my fears and hurtful events from my past, or present,
- 8) Accurately, gently, and genuinely confess these sins- connection- structures when convinced by God to do so, and receive His forgiveness emotionally as well as intellectually,
- 9) Repent in prayer [will define this] of these sins- connected- structures using "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" diagram found in this book, and in the process, invite grace and truth into my life through Jesus Christ's presence,
- 10) Give up pertinent fears, and forgive those who hurt me, including myself, and give up judging and attacking God for letting me be hurt in the first place. Use "I" – statements in this context [will define this]. Satan likes to use lies in the contexts of my past hurts to re-enforce and grow "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within me. I need to learn how to deal healthily with my anger, self-pity, yucky-feelings, and confusion and fight through blocks to stably believe and see God as good so His peace reigns within me,
- 11) Search to grow in love out of caring for people; I don't just wait around for it,
- 12) Continue to renew my mind [there are many helpful strategies one can employ to do this found in chapter four] as "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" gets dismantled and uprooted,
- 13) In prayer jettison my idols (if any) when made aware of them,

- 14) Invite God (into where He belongs) in my own life daily
- 15) Submit to God and resist the devil [will define this],
- 16) Live by grace “thinking”; and not by Law “thinking” when seeking to love or are being tempted to sin. Grace is activated when I ask Jesus for it and receive it by faith, not only at the moment of salvation, but in every situation and every moment.
- 17) Make the most of every opportunity and live for and give myself to something greater than myself: namely God, and out of caring obedience to Jesus carry out His commands through grace and truth via His teachings in the light of His promises, i.e. practice the Golden Rule in the context of grace.
- 18) “Set out each morning to build healthy relationships with God and people instead of obsessively focusing on rules or principles all the time. There are so many good things one can do, so choosing the right things to do requires two-way communication with God through two-way journaling.”⁸
- 19) Always return my focus to Jesus. Choose to let Jesus save me through trust in Him. Remind myself often that it is Jesus who saves me from sin and enables me to love.
- 20) Go deeper! When I feel real or fake guilt, are perplexed, and confused; then I seek God with all my heart and embrace His Love and Peace and deal with the yucky ness through relationship with Jesus and His truth and grace. I choose to believe there is more that God has in store for me, always returning to the basics found in this book to tackle the giants in the Promised Land.
- 21) Realize I am not alone in my struggles, weakness, and challenges. Jesus is with me, to help, direct, and protect me. This comes from the promise of His grace, which means His empowering presence is with me always no matter how dark it gets. There is always hope. This has the ability to bring real peace, focus, and do away with many battles God does not intend us to fight. Like struggling with compulsions towards sin or powerlessness to love. This step is crucial to tapping into the person of Jesus: “to believe I’m not alone and that Jesus is with me now and always” makes me strong.
- 22) Practice prayer in the forms of: making petitions, seeking instruction, worshipping God, and developing my friendship with God.

These spiritual acts together will help one to get healthier spiritually and to bear the fruit of the Spirit. When I say I “will define...” please don't gloss over the “working definitions” when given as without them this book has no power to change anyone. The Twenty-Two-Principles above will be discussed in depth in this book in the context of dismantling “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me. I will attempt to explain my “take” on these basics of the Christian life (that I did not understand well or did not know the importance of for a very long time) that need to be practiced daily to remain free in love for God, self and one’s neighbors. They are the basics to growing up into maturity, deep fellowship with people, and intimacy with God. They are done through Jesus’ grace and truth...not self-righteous-self-effort.

⁸ Mark Virkler, video feed

Freedom is found in being who we are (re)created to be, not by trying to conform to rules or ideals with pressure.

When we are renewing our minds, confusion will be a visitor. That means we need to find our bearings often because we need some clarity of mind, along with embracing healthy clean energy to process our divided loyalties, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, thinking, understanding, and knowledge when it comes to our relationships to make progress spiritually and relationally. We do this in prayer, and not through analyzing.

Renewing our minds means learning to see people, God, and ourselves positively, healthily, gracefully, and warmly. Sour, negative, judgmental attitudes can and should be jettisoned in our relationships by further embracing the Golden Rule with grace as that something higher, and the other commands from the New Testament. In getting free from our negative sinful attitudes as outlined here, we will have a foretaste of Heaven on earth. But we need to accept life as bumpy, and people as perfectly imperfect too.

When it comes to all lies; know that we believe them because we trust their source, or foolishly see them as true because they have just enough truth to sway us. Asking the Holy Spirit to heal our hearts and minds, asking Him to show us what needs to be jettisoned, and to lead us into the truth, and believing He will is key to finding renewal. And then to focus on loving others and at the same time listening for little “t”-truths to guide and set us free. We know something is true when it sets us free.

When one realizes one has sinful thoughts, the first thing to do is to connect with God, and dialogue and reason with Him in prayer to get one’s bearings straight. One ought to not blindly try to coldly, mechanically, lifelessly, fearfully, and religiously confess one’s “supposed” sins immediately. Not all thoughts in our heads are ours. The healthiest thing to do is talk with the Holy Spirit as our friend and guardian, and if He says it is okay, then to go ahead and confess the unhealthy thoughts that spring from our unhealthy attitude(s).

It is not wise to jump to conclusions when praying about the vices mentioned here. Trying to not go for red herrings is wise, although as beginners that will happen as part of the learning curves we are on. The understanding behind the tree-diagram from this book is a skeletal framework meant to help bring healing. But the motives, roots, and intrigues of the heart need to be searched out with a commitment to truth, respect, wisdom, God's will, and leading. Not with hatred, not with pressure, not by being hard on oneself, not by trying to conform to rules, and not judgmentally. Confusions in the context of hurts or wounds need to be walked through into the light, or attacked skillfully with rubber-meets-the-road-wisdom and God's empowering presence and leading. God is with us in this process.

Situations arose that had many seemingly possible courses of healing through many seemingly

wise prayers, and I would try praying some of them only to find out that I didn't see the whole picture and to have somehow gotten numb and fleshly inside instead of getting free. I found doing the things below meant I unwisely trampled on stuff somehow with unhealthy prayers of mine and that I needed to be more connected, observant, and aware of what I was doing, and then to address the issues in my heart or relationships from a healthier perspective that God leads me to. Having said this it can be hit-and-miss at times when it comes to praying healthily and making progress, but I learned over time to refrain from generalizing and rushing over stuff in prayer and when making resolutions.

Numbness and fleshly energy happen within when I:

- 1) Re-confess a sin that was already forgiven and dealt with (this is not healthy or wise as it is not genuine and respecting the truth that God already forgave). Prayer should not be lazy, cavalier, and insulated from the truth.
- 2) Consciously agree with a demonic kind of wisdom somehow within a prayer to God and not coming to Him to give it up (i.e. thinking that truth does not matter).
- 3) Pray to God with a proud attitude instead of approaching God to get rid of my pride.
- 4) Use prayer as a spell (as an algorithm, like a coin we put into a vending machine) to get what I want, instead of humbly respecting that God's will be done.
- 5) Make self-righteous independent declarations or commitments to supposedly right behaviors in prayer (and even out of prayer).
- 6) Having a mean, and angry tone in prayer while seeking change fueled by a judgmental "I'm not like those other people"- self-righteous attitude.
- 7) Make huge blanket-covering-types of prayers that act more like sweeping stuff (sin, feelings, motivations, energy, attitudes) under rugs, than being real and in touch with what is within me, and
- 8) Pray an acceptable prayer that God could use to start getting the bad-stuff processed and cleaned up inside of me, but with nothing happening, because I won't relax and let Him do what I asked. For example, when I push bad-stuff down within to supposedly clean my insides up (instead of connecting with it and cooperating with God to process it) stops me from doing healthy business with God.

When I find myself here, it is wise for me to confess what went wrong, give it up in faith, ask for the opposite virtue, trust in Jesus' presence, and walk forward believing grace and truth are restoring and guiding me (we walk by faith and not sight).

For instance, I might think I need to forgive a person for holding back on something I wanted, but the real issue can be that I have a demanding, coveting, and grasping spirit that is rooted in pride and selfishness. If it is the latter, then no amount of forgiving the other person will heal the relationship, but when I confess to God the sin in my heart, and repent in prayer I will find healing and love in me for the person who was seemingly holding out on me.

Then again, the situation could be reversed, it might have nothing to do with my pride or

supposed jealousy, but that the other person was insensitive towards me. In this case, I need to forgive them from the heart so I can continue to love them.

Also, the situation can involve hypocritical expectations on my part, with there being dirty laundry belonging to the other party too. This should be sorted out with wisdom and prayer.

Also, I might have believed lies about the people involved, including myself. Either way the Holy Spirit needs to be invited into the situations and I need to listen, and obey; and I need to know when to sit back and wait for wisdom and when to fight off any possible demonic oppressing thoughts that cause confusion with lies or accusations in my mind, so my moral compass, intuition, and conscience can once again speak to me so I will know where I stand and what to do.

Next, I might not have the full picture so I need to give the benefit of the doubt to all the people involved, as love believes the best about people (I will have problems doing this if I am in the habit of using angry pressure or self-pity to get my way).

When conflicts arise, then I need to own my anger. I might direct my anger one way only to find out it should have been directed another way. That is par for the course. That does not mean the anger shouldn't have existed...it is a sign or alarm that something is wrong (I might not know the details or reasons for it immediately). I need to try to not jump to hurtful harmful conclusions and actions. I need to focus on nonviolent conflict resolution because the anger alarm has gone off, when I do, then my anger has done its job. I need courage to confront people when I am level headed, when needed, provided the Lord gives the go ahead.

When I first started working the tree diagram found in this book, I was dealing with generalities and mostly my unhealthy attitudes rooted in the past which was difficult because my memory was not always reliable. Then after quite some time, I began to learn how to navigate situations in real time more wisely because baggage or distorted lenses were jettisoned using the strategy to dismantle the connections from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me. These situations in the present became more hopeful than before to deal with because of the new and healthier relational wisdom I was now able to learn from Jesus on how to navigate my relationships. As I go on I am seeing more things in play, and am getting a better feel for how healthy relationships work and how to diffuse conflicts in healthy nonviolent ways, and how to give opinions that are not insulting, and this all leads to gentleness, humility, and love.

Gentleness does not mean I don't own my anger because if I don't own my anger and process it healthily, then my gentleness is faked. The processes outlined in this book when implemented also comes to mean greater and greater intimacy, relating on deeper levels, being more honest with people, having warmer humor, and not relying on/ or going to attitudes of self-pity, anger or meanness (because of little disappointments) to demand things or use force to get things.

Sometimes something can hit one the wrong way and one thinks it is a momentary “thing” yet it touches and affects negatively one’s thinking, attitudes, and the way one navigates one’s relationships until it is processed in a healthy way. Not processing the baggage can cause one to engage in plenty of self-pity and angry pressure because that may be part of one’s strategy to attempt fixing things spiritually. But this is no way to get to the place of living out the Golden Rule in my life. I feel restricted, clumsy, powerless, and disconnected when this happens. And it is not that I’m screaming for blood, or want revenge...I’m just “really” slow in realizing that I took offense, or hold things against other people at times. In sharing this with others I know I’m not the only one who experiences such things. Things are getting healthier over time though.

My feelings can still linger around a bit, and they linger because I often say to myself that because I still sort of feel them they must be my true-state and so validates my “old self”. This is dangerous and untrue. When we see movies, we will see stuff that is portrayed as true that we naturally get emotional about even though it is all acting. When thoughts enter our heads they immediately trigger our emotions and we experience them whether or not they are true or false.

The attitudes I experience don’t mean the beliefs behind them are always true or are grounded in reality. It is important to me to not struggle with them in a fleshly dark-way, and to not wrestle with them in my own negative energy trying to make negative emotions vanish that are uncomfortable.

It is not a good idea to navigate purely by my feelings or attempt to manufacture feelings in my own strength to supposedly feel holy, pure or happy. Feelings fluctuate, and truth is a better compass. Having said this, certain feelings/ emotions/ energies/ attitudes generated by lust, pride, coveting, envy, jealousy, greed, self-pity, anger, conceit, fear, and judging should be monitored by what thoughts trigger them at the time. And if I don't want the feelings generated by these vices I have learned that I must deal with my beliefs/ thinking in the contexts of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within as outlined in this book through prayer, and renewing the mind/ heart and relationship with Jesus.

The maxim: "the universal needs to be made particular" always applies to the Golden Rule. But when I can't seem to focus on or practice the Golden Ruler then it can be quite the fight. I might need to forgive people I am holding resentments towards; or I need to accept my emotions (i.e. anger) and process them or it in prayer using “I”-statements to move from judging people to truth telling and grace. Sometimes, asking the Holy Spirit to heal my mind and waiting for His touch might be all I can do. He will always come through.

I have realized that my identity should not be that of a “slave” or to see myself as a perpetual victim to the whims, assaults, violations, disappointments, negativity, and shortcomings coming

from others. When experiencing negative emotions, it is so easy to start having negative cynical thoughts that are not based in reality, but inspired by feelings that have nothing to do with what is contextually happening.

I can have positive attitudes in the face of devastating news. I can choose to be cheerful when people expect more from me than I was counting on. My emotions and attitudes don't have to be at the mercies of capricious circumstances, and fickle or selfish people or honest people who are just doing their thing. I don't have to have a victim mentality I can own and process my attitudes (reactions or emotions in response to disagreeable things) for they determine the difference between being (strong in) joy and (weak in) self-pity and the difference between peace and unhealthily processed anger. I can be joyful so much more than Satan wants me to think I can. I don't want to go by my feelings, but by the truth and God's unconditional love! Doing this stabilizes me.

In making progress Jesus confronts my perfectionistic tendencies with liberating truths. Perfectionism makes me hard on myself and others. The Law expects perfection, but I'm not the Law, so I can choose to be gracious instead like God is. Practicing the Golden Rule [do to others as I want done to me] gives me more connection to what I personally desire, and to want the best for others too.

The war against pride is constant, the battles are the only possible victories. There are usually other sins involved with the attitudes of pride, coveting, envy, lust, judgments, greed, sloth, and gluttony.... that must be processed together with these if I want freedom to love others deeply. Self-pity is an attitude that can grow so quickly when things don't go a person's way and I have learned that it is often the first issue that needs to be dealt with together with dealing with my anger. Also, it is not wise to box things in or compartmentalize stuff. For instance, my "insensitivity" and "meanness" have been the results of pride, envy, and judging; but insensitivity and meanness also need to be confessed together with the pride, envy, and judging in prayer for there to be victory and progress in the spiritual journey. The prayer/confession I have learned needs to be accurate, gentle, heartfelt and with the same intensity as the vices, sinful attitudes, and sins I have participated in. I also need to repent in prayer from these unhealthy vices, attitudes and sins when aware of them.

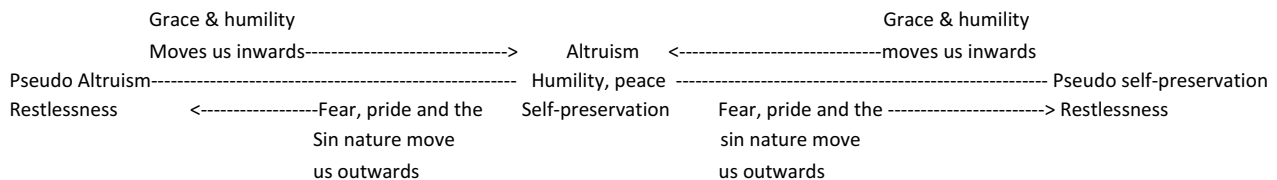
Shallow prayer does not work or get to the heart of the matter or the roots of spiritual maladies. Just saying "No" to sins is not enough, I must aim high enough to replace the darkness with light for there to be real lasting change. Jesus provides this. Going deeper is a wise strategy when it comes to spiritual growth.

3 THE POWER OF MY SIN NATURE VS. THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” is not the same as the “sin nature”. Why is it that one person has no addictions, while another can’t stop eating or getting drunk? Or, why is it that one person has spiritual pride, whereas another is humble about spiritual things? Or, why is it that one person gets jealous so easily, while another person is more altruistic? One person’s “sin nature” is not better than another person’s “sin nature” surely? No, there is a level playing field. But we can allow our “sin natures” together with our choices and folly to grow “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in us into a structure of death, hatred, malice, bad fruit, addictions and negativity that tries to push everyone away from us in the worst-case scenario.

Yes, the “sin nature” can draw one to worry, be proud, to judge, to be jealous, to be greedy, to lust, to over eat, and to be lazy. But these only become strongholds when they become compulsive, and when they do, they form a part of the structure within that is called “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” This tree is merciless.

In this chapter, I develop a rationale for how “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within develops and is acted on by the “sin nature”, fear, and pride in my life. The diagram⁹ below shows two-continuums of behavior where I can find myself. In the center is the place of humility, where there is awareness of our self-preservation and connectedness to our altruism.



These two natures are healthy God-given qualities, but within me is a “dark energy”, a “force”, or a “pull” known as the “sin nature” that tries to pull me away from humility through lies, fear and pride towards pseudo self-preservation (coveting/ envy/ selfishness) on the right, and pseudo altruism (lust or fake love) on the left. This “pull” is always there in this life and is known as the “flesh”. It tries to warp the spiritual healthiness or humility within me and tries to push me to the extreme left or right in the different contexts of my makeup, relationships, and life through fear and pride. When I grow in humility I move along either continuum towards the center. Even when I am near the center I will feel my self-preservation and altruism being pulled and harassed by the “sin nature”. One can get self-preservation confused with selfishness when one doesn't understand the pull of the “sin nature”. When I don’t jump the gun and patiently

⁹ I am grateful to my friend Rafael for a discussion that inspires this diagram.

wait, then I see the difference. The more one moves away from the center the more one acts out of lies that inspire fear and pride.

The sense of self-preservation within is strong, and I need to acknowledge it as a gift from God. The pull to the right by the “sin nature”, fear and pride is strong too, and should not be ignored, stuffed, and pushed down to try and mortify or supposedly annihilate. To annihilate the “sin nature” is an impossibility in this life. Yes, I can kill the strongholds of fear and pride, but I can't kill the “sin nature”, the “pull”, or the “dark energy” within me. God grants me grace, truth, and strategy to say, “I accept you, but I don't need you right now,” directly to the “sin nature”-attitudes when they rear their ugly heads (usually through angry pressure mixed with self-pity and possibly ugly demands), and then pray “I give it up with your help Jesus through faith”¹⁰, and to say, “yes” to Jesus' peace within who is the Holy Spirit and asking Him to overcome¹¹ my sin instead. But I will always feel the pull to the extreme right in this life.

My sense of altruism is strong too, and I need to acknowledge it as a gift from God, not as a badge of merit or honor that gets me God's favor. The “sin nature”, “pull”, and “dark energy” tries to draw me to the left, congratulating me on noble acts, trying to motivate me with fears of rejection and losses of honor, trying to move me with pride/ conceit, and seeks to put pressure on me so I will push towards a reputation of goodness that “actually” is full of lust, empty of love, and is full of self-righteousness. The fear is one of not being accepted, welcomed, loved, and cared for. My conceit when in action (also known as “the ego” going bad), actual steals genuine honor and real love directed towards me, and I need to say, “I accept you, but I don't need you right now”, directly to this dark energy within when it rears its ugly head and then pray “I give it up with your help Jesus' through faith” so I can say, “yes” to Jesus' peace: known as the Holy Spirit, and ask Him to overcome my sin. I say this because in saying, “no” to it I give it a firmer place and added power in my life to tempt that it doesn't deserve.

"It is in dying that we are born again" comes from a Prayer inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi's life, and is often used in conjunction with Saint Paul's statement: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain"¹² to wrongly mean that we can kill the part of ourselves we don't like, the “sin nature”, so we can somehow love people more deeply. This is done religiously through putting pressure on oneself through anger and self-hatred. This is all a horrible trap. We can't crucify ourselves or our flesh, and we can't kill the “sin nature”, but we can kill the strongholds mentioned in this book with Jesus' help as He shows us. When Paul used the word “die” he was referring to physical death and being united with Jesus in heaven. We can't add anything to Jesus to get

¹⁰ Insight from my friend Suda

¹¹ Cf. Romans 8:2,13

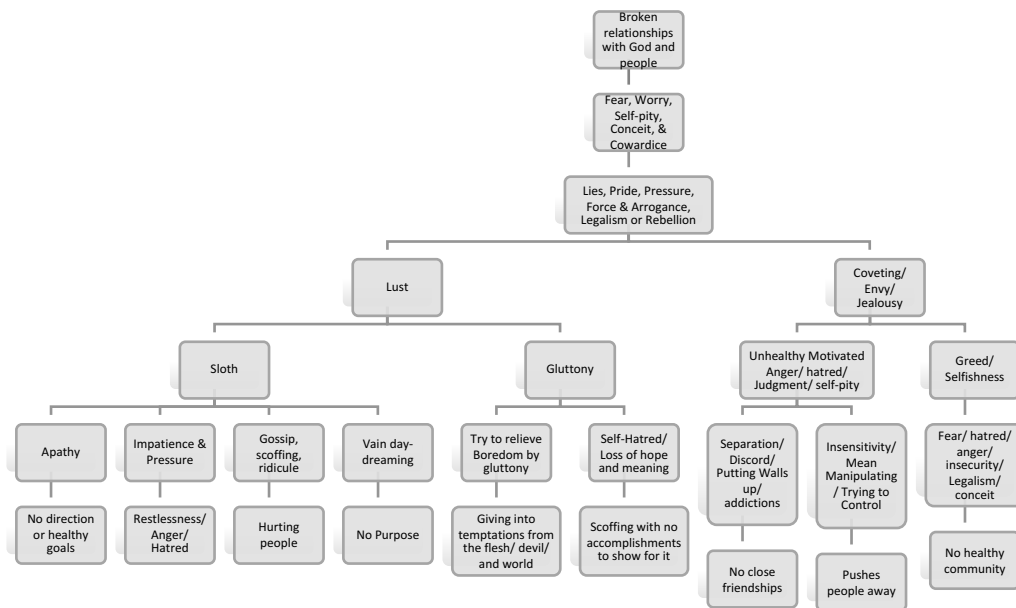
¹² Philippians 1:21

more or better on top of whom Jesus is.

When I saw that all people have a “sin nature”, a “pull”, or a “dark energy” within that the Bible calls the “flesh” or sin,¹³ then I began to realize that we are all basically the same. There is no need to feel superior, to judge, or to condemn others, and when I do, then I have spiritual pride. No matter how far I walk spiritually in this life the flesh is still with me; any healthy righteousness within me always comes from God. I have nothing to boast about (not even about God’s Spirit within me) because I am not better than anyone else.

So, Pseudo Altruism is basically fake love also known as lust. This is spoken about and developed as the left side of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” below. Pseudo Self-preservation is basically coveting, envy/ selfishness and is developed on the right side of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” below. Lies inspire fears, and pride together with the “sin nature” try to push me to these two extremes that are never absolute or complete because they are perversions of healthy humility. The power of the “sin nature” works to establish in my life the strongholds of fear, pride, coveting, envy, judging, greed, lust, gluttony, sloth and the sins that come from them. These strongholds can be dismantled in my life, but the “sin nature” can’t be dismantled. The glue that holds this tree-structure together are the lies I believe about the nature of God, people, and myself relationally in the context of conflicts or wounds or the unknown. Lies trigger broken relationships that trigger fear and guilt, and these work together with the strongholds, and make the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” a powerful structure that has sought to dominate me and the rest of humanity since initially found in the Garden of Eden as talked about in the book of Genesis, and looks like this:

¹³ Cf. Romans 7:14-20



This tree is a negative energy structure that is held together with hurts, fear, false beliefs and commitments to lies that have sinful expectations and behavior consequences.¹⁴ The very bottom row of the tree contains some of the more visible fruits or consequences of indulging in the nature of the tree; many harsher ones can be added. Obviously, this tree does not list all the sins mentioned in the Bible but it will do for our discussions. I will discuss this tree and show the prescriptions God gave me on how to dismantle it within me and how to replace it with practical life-giving wisdom together with the helping presence of the Holy Spirit.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is an invitation to decide for ourselves what is good and bad and ignore the God who sees everything. We do this when we limit or cut out the causes and effects found in the spiritual realm that God wants us to be informed about so we can make healthy and wise decisions. We aren't even always well informed about the physical realm either. There is nothing wrong with our intellects, but when we decide to limit what we can know to space, time, matter, and energy and ignore what is real but unseen then we become foolish. The tree of knowledge of good and evil's scope is limited to what we can see through the natural and our fallen human nature.

The good from this devilish tree is not defined in the sense of real tangible right-ness/ spiritual healthiness as seen in God's nature...but in the popular deceptive-shallow sense of "better-than or more-special-than"- which leads to comparisons and unhealthy pride/ superficiality which are

¹⁴ The idea that hurts, fears, and sin strongholds are connected in a well-defined way comes from an "Orthodoxy and Recovery Blog" I found online. I was led to modify, expand, and develop a structure given there (which is now missing from the Blog) into the tree diagram as it appears above. Using this tree structure as the backdrop to prompt strategic prayer has led to inner transformation for me.

perceived as good but that lead to hurtful comparisons, evil (in the real-unhealthy-sense) along with hurt because of judgments which are negative in nature; which slowly can lead to the death of the image of God in us (that we were made in). The hurting will often hurt others. A rotten apple in the presence of healthy apples usually infects the good apples. For it to be the other way around something supernatural must happen.

I think that Satan sold the idea to Eve that the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” would get her and Adam to be as “special” as God. He wanted them to think God was holding out on them. The reason I think this is because the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” was the source of a devilish kind of knowledge or dark wisdom where:

Good = (I’m more special because...) or

(Mine is more special because...) or

(I think you are less special because...)

and where:

Evil = (You think I’m less special because...) or

(Mine is less special because...) or

(You think you are more special because...)

This kind of knowledge or thinking is a hurtful kind of paradigm of thought, rooted in restlessness/ anger/ hatred, inferiority, fear and pride, and they bear the rest of the vices that all destroy wholesome/ healthy community/ and peaceful relationships. This kind of knowledge slowly defaces the image of God within us (except for the grace of God in our lives). And in so doing this knowledge helps us to hate, kill, and relish revenge, “eye for and eye” and “tooth for a tooth” actions against everyone who crosses our paths and eventually seeks the death of all. It is devoid of love, joy, peace, humility, warmth, kindness, hope, gentleness, valuing people, caring, altruism, and being a living sacrifice in the healthiest sense possible.

The “sin nature” has been wrongly relied on by me to try to save me from things that are uncomfortable by inspiring me to use self-pity and anger to get changes interiorly, in my circumstances, and my relationships. I only land up with guilt or meanness and restlessness/ anger/ more self-pity linked to demands for my way to come through in the end that may be limited by the presence of grace and mercy given by God.

The “tree of knowledge of good and evil’s” seed, structure and fruit has infected all fallen humanity: Adam and Eve and us their fallen descendants. The tree’s infecting power is in the lies spoken to us that we too quickly and easily embrace because they promise us instant peace, alleviation of fears, and the lie that God’s promises to provide ways through darkness are not

trustworthy. The devil promised independence, but made us slaves to sin, but only Jesus can free us from this tangled mess through the Good News found in the New Testament (NT).

4 HOW I'VE LEARNT TO DISMANTLE THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN ME

The hideous “tree of knowledge of good and evil” structure spoken about here and the theology found in this book have helped me tackle the sin strongholds structure through strategic prayer and this structure is not meant to be analyzed in a vacuum devoid of God's input. Knowledge of the structure of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” is intended to facilitate questions that I am able to ask God about that relate to my history and current story whose answers lead to confession, repentance, and forgiveness in order to dismantle the tree within so that love can thrive within me. Once the strongholds from the tree are dismantled then renewing one's thinking, and habits needs to be tackled next¹⁵. We know when this happens because the compulsions are gone, we see the lies for what they are, but we don't automatically know how to think healthily and can have plenty of confusion. This makes sense, because the tree structure that we removed with God's help did dry up the soil in our hearts where it was planted. The part of one's heart affected needs to be tilled, watered with the Holy Spirit, seeded with Scripture, and spending time in prayer with Jesus so He can speak life into our parched desert like hearts.

All journeys of healing made possible by God begin with and are sustained by a faith that says with a clean energy that God is good and trustworthy. The Gospel of Luke says about some sick men who met Jesus, that “they were healed on their way”¹⁶. This is the way it is with most healing: it takes time. As I believe what the Spirit communicates to me, get rid of my self-pity, doubt, pettiness, unbelief, accusations, attacks, judgments, anger, demanding ness, inflexibility, “poor me”- thinking, and “it's unfair to wait so long”- thinking directed negatively at God and those I fail to love, and instead learn how to abide in Jesus through faith and teachable ness, God is able to get the healing process going.

Jesus is the true Vine and I need to put my faith in Him if I want to grow in bearing good fruit. I can't earn a spot in the true Vine by my actions, piety, holiness, human intellect, positions, degrees, or great philosophies. I can't earn a good relationship with God. By resting in Jesus through grace and faith I will if I am committed to mercy bear much good fruit and in the process, dismantle the dead structure mentioned above within me. The “tree of knowledge of good and evil” promises to keep me supposedly in control and special; it has a devilish “understanding” and “energy belief structure” of supposed goodness that bears the bad fruit that sane people “really” don't want in their lives.

¹⁵ In coming to grips with my faulty understanding on love and pride, I wrote two more books entitled respectively, *Exploring Faith Hope and Love*, and *Exploring Humility and Pride*

¹⁶ Luke 17:14

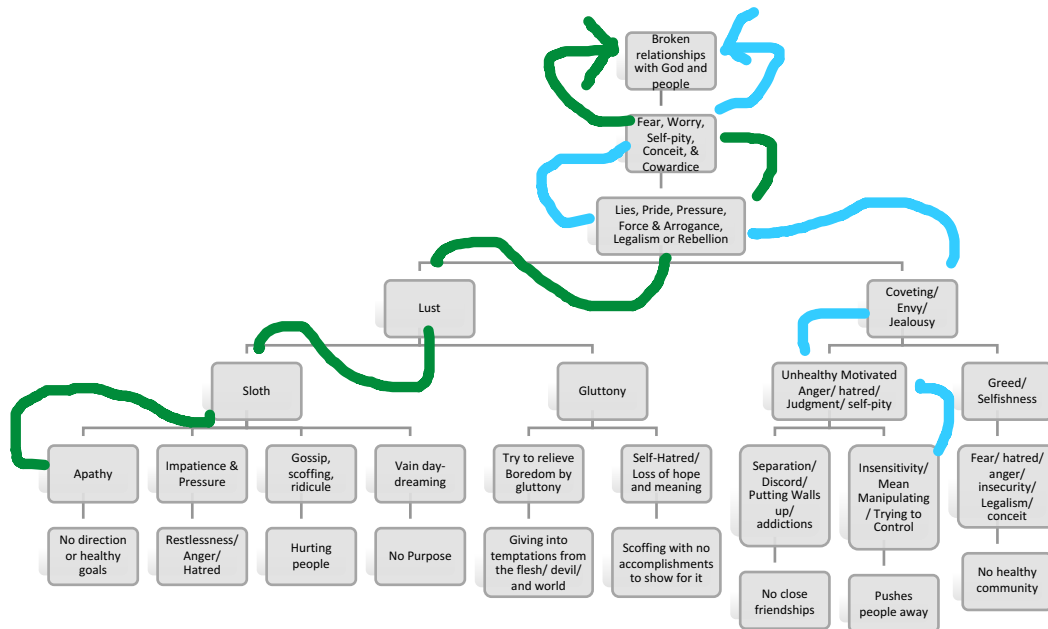
In becoming aware of the connections between the building blocks from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” it is best to look at my bad fruit and ask God what hurts and fear(s) motivate them, and asking the Holy Spirit what lies motivate or keep the tree structure together through fear within me. Also, I need to ask; are the fears I have contextually related to a broken relationship with God or unhealed hurts from broken relationships with certain people either in the past or those in the present. Once the connections are understood and hit home then I have found it is time to dismantle them through real grace, real truth, strategic prayer, forgiveness, with less confusion, and more light. This involves confessing my sins/ bad attitudes/ bad energy/ fears/ and resentments, and repenting in prayer from them working upwards through the tree diagram presented earlier. This keeps the guessing and frustration to a minimum, and helps me find and dismantle the real motivations/ roots for my sin strongholds in less time, and therefore to grow in the freedom to love with each victory.

When confusion, and fleshly energy operate in the present, know that the past is not fully dealt with...especial where and when one's greatest hurts and wounds did occur...where the devil promised stuff that wrongly seemed justified; however, the devil's promises are always empty, robbing people of their true humanity. Intense fear and confusion go together and cloud one's judgment and lead to thinking one is saving oneself by holding onto the power and control promised from the dark side. The devil promises power and tries to justify everyone's sense of injustice or unfairness to win them over to resentment. This needs to be prayed through thoroughly for healing and freedom to flourish and thrive, by forgiving the agents of our hurts and learning to believe the real truth about what happened, and how to “really” approach life.

Below is my “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” within, and I have learned to “work out my salvation” by dismantling it and its influence within me through confession, repentance in prayer, renewing my mind, giving up fears, and forgiving. I do so based on what is currently happening in my life spiritually by noticing the triggers and the bad fruit involved and working my way up the tree diagram in prayer dealing with one stronghold after another until I get to the source: resentments and fears that spring from making judgments on hurts that I justified by believing foolish lies. Healing possible wounds in my heart such as resentments by forgiveness or having to give up judgments about people is wise. For instance, if I struggle with apathy I can pray through the connections from the bottom upwards (like the darker line-arrow shown in the diagram below), from sin to sin or attitude to attitude until I deal with my fears and wounds. In so doing I cooperate with God in healing my broken heart through His grace and truth.

I also have my relationships with other humans made healthier through working this process out thoroughly. The reason I start at the bottom of the tree-diagram is because that is where the most visible fruit-sins are located; to me they are the most visible too when I have sinned (my conscience usually tells me quickly enough) and by reflection I see the connections between the

sins all the way up to my fears and broken relationship with God or certain people. Praying through the relevant connections will bring healing and growth. Because life is messy and complicated, I am working these connections in prayer regularly over time and I am slowly growing in purity of heart as God promises in Revelation 3:18 by inviting grace and truth into my life through relationship and two-way prayer with Jesus.



For example, following the light-grey-arrow-line: In the past, I had somebody withholding something that I used to take for granted, and I felt hurt, and angry because it had been denied. I was therefore tempted to try to control the person in my anger because I had an attitude of angry jealousy because they withheld from me but were giving to others. This was connected to unhealthy pride, because I judged the person in a negative light thinking I knew better than them; but then the pride is connected to the fear of losing forever what was being withheld. The way I dealt with this is to pray through the connections in a thorough manner, something like this:

Lord Jesus, I confess that I have anger, and am therefore tempted to control or push the person away in question. I yield my sense of entitlement to you in faith, and I give up my desire to control this person out of my pride. I give up my coveting what this person has through my demanding attitude, and instead I choose to go to a place of warmth in my heart towards this person with your help in faith as I can't do it myself, because I'm not better than this person. The highest "good" is "to love", and I choose to love this person with your help Jesus because there is nothing else that matters more, and in doing so I speak to my "fear of losing what I wanted so badly because of my sense of entitlement"

saying, “I give you up fear because Jesus is sufficient and supplies all my needs” and I say, “yes” to loving this person as myself with your empowering presence, Lord Jesus, and I accept your forgiveness and healing God for all my sins mentioned here. Thank you for never leaving me nor forsaking me and stepping into the battle with me. Amen!

The reason why this method works is because it connects the mind and the heart with God in a biblical, thorough, and inside out strategic way that deals with many of the roots or growths that have lived in me bringing death into my life over the years.

Praying repeatedly in this way in the different contexts of my relational life is helping to slowly dismantle the strongholds mentioned in the tree diagram. My confession and prayer needs to be genuine, and so I will define these terms in ways that work for me. This is not a complete map to freedom; I know that other truths are often very well needed to heal our/ my heart(s) so we/ I can love people more deeply over time. There may be more branches, so going deeper in prayer is wise if things keep getting triggered in the present.

There are times when I feel unhealthy fleshly stuff/ emotions/ attitudes/ energies and don’t know how to label or classify them by myself, and therefore deal with them. I have found that when I experience these attitudes/ energies there are two strategies I can employ. (1) Ask God to show me what I’m not seeing and wait on Him to bring to mind what He wants me to pray about. Or, (2) is to connect with the feelings or unhealthy attitudes/ energies and pray to God asking Him: “What am I feeling inside Lord Jesus?” while waiting/ searching for spontaneous words which come from the Holy Spirit that describe the energy. Then am I able to pray in the pattern as suggested above for God to bring healing. I also need to be open to hearing truths that can undo lies I have believed that give the tree dark energy power to make sin flourish. We have not because we ask not.

With me, I’ve felt nothing virtuous when I know I should in some situations. This means that I was numb inside, stuck emotionally, and had unprocessed baggage to deal with. I have found that feeling the numbness within, and using the same strategies in the last paragraph works well too.

§ 4.2: POTENT SCRIPTURES:

I don’t feel, like I used to, that the dead structure within me was like a hidden dark complex vine that is wildly knotted and a nebulous mess to untie, difficult to understand, and so confusing that it disheartened and intimidated me to not even try to untangle the mess. I now have a strategy to fight the strongholds within me with Jesus’ grace and truth. This strategy is built up from the following Scriptures:

- 1) I will never leave you nor forsake you (Joshua 1:5)
- 2) Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)

- 3) You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13)
- 4) Pray unceasingly (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
- 5) Humble yourself therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He might lift you up in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)
- 6) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)
- 7) Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. (Mark 3:2)
- 8) That's why I tell you to have faith that you have already received whatever you pray for, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:24)
- 9) Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Rev. 3:20)
- 10) Cease striving and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)
- 11) Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)
- 12) I can do all things through Him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)
- 13) No weapon forged against you will prevail (Isaiah 54:17)
- 14) Judge not and condemn not. (Cf. Luke 6:37)
- 15) Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)
- 16) Do unto others as you want them to do to you. (Matthew 7:12, aka the "Golden Rule")
- 17) Love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:31)
- 18) Forgive and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37)
- 19) We are not under Law, but grace. (Romans 6:14)
- 20) Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. (John 7:38), and
- 21) For we live by faith not sight. (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- 22) You do not have because you do not ask God. (James 4:2)

Again, I believe that all necessary revelations that bring freedom will come gradually. Rushing things is bad, generalizing things is bad, but seeking to listen to the Holy Spirit while resting in His peace without fleshly striving to make things happen is wisest.

Humility (teachableness) is key to making these Scriptures work in my life. Praying just any prayer modeled in this book before one sees/ discerns/ senses/ and understands the vices spoken about contextually in oneself and can remember having committed them or knows one has such attitudes, is not wise. Always connecting with my feelings, my hunger and thirst when praying about them to God is wise! In doing so I am connecting my mind to my heart.

Being in touch with my feelings will put me in touch with my thinking which I can then renew as I continue to seek God with all my heart; and I will eventually find God and the freedom He offers in the process. Being connected to the source of my feelings such as unhealthy desires/

anger/ faulty beliefs/ stinking thinking/ bad commitments/ and misguided loyalties means I can repent from them more fully with Jesus' help/ grace. Disconnection often means I have stuffed, denied, compartmentalized, or become blind to the nature of my attitudes, and the vices.

I will now make some important definitions (along with some commentary) that have made the dismantling process possible and understandable, and easier to work for me. These working definitions are what this book hinge on. Without them the contents of this book are meaningless, and have no power! Biblical language and concepts can often have religious ideas superimposed on them or negative skeptical worldly connotations, and so lose their meaning and power. Who uses the word "repent" in public these days? It is often misunderstood by people both outside and inside the church. These definitions below are meant to put us on the same page and move us forward.

§ 4.3: POTENT WORKING DEFINITIONS:

WORKING DEFINITION (for ceaselessly pray):

♥ To ceaselessly pray means to replace one's constant monologue to oneself in one's head with two-way dialogue with God. ♥

This is done by reasoning with God through faith, and letting His wisdom and life spontaneously flow like a river into the otherwise stagnant pool of our minds and hearts to bring life, joy, relationship, and renewal. Also, it means to express one's feelings honestly to God so we can honestly process them. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom on how to make wise decisions that are non-judgmental and kind in nature so our relationships grow and don't stagnate.

I know, because of a half-truth, that for a long time I saw God as a power to be used, accessed, and worshipped for my benefit alone. I was in error. God deserves our worship. God also needs to be respected, cared about, loved, and touched just like we humans seek these for ourselves; after all, we are made in His image. He also seeks to be valued, cherished, seen as important for His own sake because He is three persons with likes and dislikes, and seeks to be in healthy relationships just like we do. To the degree that we fear breaking God's heart and desire to respect Him as someone who wants to be loved, to this degree we will supernaturally love others too.

God became man, and in doing so He chose to become dependent on our love which ultimately comes from Him. So, seeking God to manipulate Him into giving us stuff is unhealthy. Seeking to give and receive from God is healthier than taking from Him and using Him.

Asking the Holy Spirit, a question, and listening for an answer can be very straight forward when we know the promises and principles found in the Scriptures and believe them. When one comes into God's presence one shouldn't do so lightheartedly, otherwise one won't take God's

answers seriously, and one won't be as discerning concerning God's voice. We can test the source of the communications we hear after having asked a question to the Holy Spirit by simply asking the source: "Is this the flesh or the Spirit speaking?" If it is the "flesh" then reject the message; if it is "Spirit" then we can further test the content we are sure the Holy Spirit has spoken to us. The book by Brad Jersak called, *Can You Hear Me?* provides a lot of practical wisdom on how we can go deeper into two-way prayer and I highly recommend it.

Mark Virkler's book on two-way prayer through journaling called: *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice* is also very helpful. The keys are meant to give structure to the process of journaling. They are:

- key 1). Quiet yourself,
- key 2). Tune into vision,
- key 3). Tune into spontaneity, and
- key 4). Journal.

They help one to listen, remember and reflect on what "actually" is said by God in a non-judgmental and less skeptical fashion. He provides biblical tests to discern what is written and is well worth the read and practice.

Both books have been foundational to arriving at the contents found in this book.

WORKING DEFINITION (for Attitudes):

♥ Attitudes are evaluations people make about objects, ideas, events, or other people. Attitudes can be positive or negative. Explicit attitudes are conscious beliefs that can guide decisions and behavior. Implicit attitudes are unconscious beliefs that can still influence decisions and behavior. ♥

Thoughts and ideas trigger feelings. Whereas beliefs about what we or others deserve determine our attitudes. In changing our thoughts, we change our feelings. In changing our beliefs, we change our attitudes. Feelings come and go whereas attitudes have so much more staying power for good and evil. Attitudes are energies (commitments to behaviors) that have likes, dislikes, and desires that can carry judgments that determine some of our emotions and behaviors. In getting rid of bad attitudes we no longer want, we need to give up the lies believed, and judgments associated with them, and the energy (commitment) that translates into the behaviors. Renewing the mind/ heart through confession together with repenting in prayer, forgiving people, and seeking God's will is the way to do just that.

WORKING DEFINITION (for Renewing one's mind/ heart):

♥ Renewing one's mind/ heart involves confession [which is a must!], repentance (from sin and sin strongholds) in prayer, giving up fears, forgiving people, and giving up judgments, and then reprogramming the mind's pathways, and the heart's habits. Below are some helpful strategies

one can use to achieve complete renewal in problem areas through reprogramming pathways and habits in the mind and heart as “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” is dismantled and removed and we deal more frequently with the “sin nature” within instead:

1. Whenever we encounter ugly stuff that is triggered in some way, the first thing to do is confess it to God.
2. Using “I” – statements to replace judgments with truth. I will define this further below in the context of forgiveness.
3. To replace lies believed with practical commonsense truths, such as found in the Bible especially the truth that God inserts into one’s mind through conversations with every day people.
4. Welcome Jesus’ presence and become teachable by incorporating His truth, teaching, promises, and grace into the different contexts in one’s personal and relational life.
5. Sometimes, one can be so engaged in mentally saying “No” to a “bad attitude” without success, that the healthiest thing one can do is to pray: **“Jesus with your help I give up saying ‘No’ to the ‘bad attitude’”,** and instead to healthily pray: **“Jesus I give up the ‘bad attitude’ with your help in faith.”** I have done this and found tangible success in areas that had stymied me for years. The reason this strategy works is because it moves me from “self-righteously attempting to save myself through my own will power” to inviting “God into the repentance process through His grace.” Sometimes the greatest obstacles to freedom are self-effort, anger, and self-pity. Sometimes the “No!” we use on ourselves can be so self-loathing, mean, pressure-driven, desperate, and utterly without faith in God’s offer to help bring closure, no wonder it gives no success. Praying like suggested in this paragraph in the areas that trigger: desires for skewed justice, vengeance, brutality, hatred, and self-mutilation really will be a game changer. It is for me.
6. Next, I’m not talking about panhandling here. Rather, I’m talking about when the attitude of self-pity is being used as leverage on a person to give what is demand. Self-pity is used to get one’s way by appealing to another’s pity, i.e. trying to get people to feel uncomfortable and sorry for one’s situation so they come through for one. Most people don’t reward such ugly behavior thankfully, but those who employ it seemingly can’t stop it because it is a habit that started from childhood. When anger is used to pressure, force or manipulate change in any realm, then it is also inspired by the “sin nature” just like using self-pity is: because both are trying to manipulate, pressure or force things. Sometimes the self-pity can seem so intense that it hides from us that we are using anger for selfish motives too. Also, if we are using anger, then often using self-pity accompanies it too, and we ought to examine both possibilities when we are struggling with the “sin nature” and want freedom from our compulsions and insensitive strongholds so we can love people more deeply. When the “sin nature” is active by way of using anger or self-pity to get my way. I have learned that I need to say, **“I accept you, but I don't need you right now”,** directly to these “sin nature”- attitudes when they are initiated or triggered, because in trying to just say “No” to them, I give them more power and that means I need to

expend more energy and time as well to wrestle with or resist them if I'm conscientious. And then to pray, **"I give it up with your help Jesus' through faith"** I have learned that I need to accept my "sin nature" and not leave it out of my calculations.

7. To take advantage of an **"Event+Reaction=Outcome"** - strategy. By this I mean between an event (or trigger) and the outcome is a span of time where one can reprogram one's mind and heart settings instead of having the old unwanted junk codes to replay or repeat continually. For instance, if we are angry with ourselves for falling into a sin, and are inclined to use angry pressure to change it, then speaking to the anger, one can say: **"I accept you but don't need you right now"**, and then to pray, **"I give it up with your help Jesus through faith."** And saying to Jesus: **"Your grace is sufficient"** and then to ask oneself, **"What do I want most instead of this old sin habit?"** Then to decide on it, and prayerfully commit to thinking and acting in ways that makes the most of every opportunity. Gradually a new habit replaces the old habit pattern and one is free in the problem area.
8. When it comes to self-pity, ask yourself do you want to be negative or positive? Realize that negativity draws negative stuff to you. Realize that positivity draws positive stuff to you. Self-pity is negative in nature. So choose a positive attitude instead of self-pity.
9. When using self-pity and anger inappropriately are BIG issues in one's life, then going back in one's memories and processing the self-pity and anger in prayer from the past up to the present as shown in this book will bring healing and joy. If we experience "cranked up" self-pity repeatedly triggered in the same context, then baggage from the past is still not completely dealt with. The "triggers" get us in touch with our trauma and emotions from the past. They are doorways to healing.
10. Self-pity can also be rooted in a deep seeded belief that life, people and God are unfair! Either a person looks through life with such a lens or a person looks at life with the eyes of grace! God is better than fair or unfair! God is into grace! Grace is unconditional love; meaning He loves us whether we do bad, do good, or have apathy! He doesn't stop loving us because we did bad stuff, and we don't have to earn His love by doing good stuff.
11. The choice is ours! Remaining committed to a view that life is unfair leads to self-pity, envy, meanly demanding stuff, and using anger! Choosing to see life through the eyes of grace, instead of a cup that is half-empty, leads to making the most of every opportunity! This is done one situation at a time. If we pour all our energy into being happy, happiness will elude us. We can't work up the emotional state of happiness, but we can choose to be grateful in all our circumstances because God is good. Grace leads to joy. Gratitude and praise directed at God are key to silencing a lot of self-pity, but it must be done wisely without shoving things under the carpet.
12. To navigate by barriers or judgments of "unfairness" so one doesn't go to places of self-pity, anger and hostility, one can pray something like: **"I give up with your help Lord Jesus to saying 'No' to 'things that seemingly look unfair'. Instead, I give up with your help Lord Jesus looking at life through the 'lens of unfairness,' I choose instead**

to look at and celebrate life through the eyes of GRACE and gratitude with your help Lord Jesus! Thanks! Amen! And, then to choose to love the person(s) who seem(s) to be making things unfair. This last part can't be glossed over.

13. Ask God regularly for Him to replace the unwanted vices in us with the gifts of opposite corresponding virtues. For instance, if we struggle with gluttony we ask Him for self-control. If we struggle with conceit we ask for the ability to respect all people along with ourselves. If we struggle with pride we ask for humility. If we struggle with greed, we ask for generosity. If we struggle with cowardice we ask for courage. If we struggle with judging we ask for tolerance...etc. We have not because we ask not. But we have to ask God in faith, not with double mindedness, to receive His gifts.
14. Don't attempt to do everything by yourself - let God into the picture because He cares for you deeply. We are not alone, or abandoned, Jesus is with us to help. He will never leave us nor forsake us. We shouldn't think we are by ourselves. We remind ourselves often that we aren't orphans. When connected to Jesus there is peace; with peace the attraction to sin or gluttony is lessened and so we practice self-control more victoriously. This is a result of grace: God's empowering presence. ♥

WORKING DEFINITION (for Confession):

♥ I use the word, "confess" a lot in this book. By it I mean that we admit gently, accurately and emotionally (not acted or forced) our sins, our unhealthy attitudes, their story and their history to God; agree with God that they are wrong, and say we are sorry for them, requesting to be forgiven them and healed of them by God. When we do this, First John 1:9 promises God will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We need to claim this promise and hold onto it during and after confessing our sins and as we seek to repent because if we don't there is little chance of cleansing and healing coming from God. Sometimes the key that breaks the power of a sin habit comes quickly, other times we need to be patient. So, we ought to not give up. We walk by faith, and not by sight. ♥

It is very important for me to not just intellectualize stuff. I need to connect with my emotions, and that means getting in touch with the peace that comes from being forgiven by God, along with the joy, stability, Devine touch, and breath of life that confession and forgiveness brings into our lives through the Holy Spirit.

While confessing my sins to God, I have learned that it is a bad idea to always speak in generalities. When I can put meat on the bone I should do so. Lies have a better chance of being exposed when I get specific and look at the details more closely while trying to understand the unhealthy energy/ attitudes/ and mechanisms working in my heart and mind when it comes to sin. When I do this, the Holy Spirit can speak truth into the different areas of my life and so set me free.

When I walk while holding onto promises from God I am walking in faith. In this way when I get

a promise fulfilled then I will know automatically who fulfilled it and will continue to walk in faith with thanksgiving. God gives people stuff because He loves them, and not because of they supposedly have faith muscles. Faith is like a door that opens to let God's provision in. God loves us people even when we don't have faith, and does give people (both good and bad) stuff because He cares for us all. God loved us while we were still His enemy.

WORKING DEFINITION (for Grace)

♥ Grace is God's unconditional love for us, as well as His empowering presence. Unconditional love means we are loved whether we do good, do bad or are apathetic. This means God does not love us less when we do bad, nor do we have to earn His love by doing good works. Grace as far as God's empowering presence is concerned comes through a humble faith in Jesus by trusting that He has not left me as an orphan, that He cares for me and does help me fight my battles. For me, I invite grace by asking Jesus for it, and believing I have received it with thanksgiving and choosing to live like I have that grace. ♥

Judging and pride swallow up grace, so repenting of such sin strongholds is critical for God's grace and presence to be felt in my life. When I don't feel grace, I still trust that it is there, because Jesus promised us that He would never leave nor forsake us.¹⁷

Before attempting to repent from a sin, one needs to first confess one's sin in the problem area to God. The next two definitions deal with repenting in a way that works for me.

WORKING DEFINITION (for Repent in Prayer from sin):

♥ The word **"repent"** means to renew or change one's mind about our sin and the lies we believed that made us give into the temptations, and this is always done with God's help in prayer. Practically this means praying something like:

I give up saying "No!" in my own self-righteous energy to the sin of "_____ " and in faith with your help and grace Lord Jesus I give up the sin instead, asking you to help me renew my mind (by bringing to my mind the lies I believed that caused me to sin) so I can give them up. Wait and listen for the Holy Spirit to tell you the lies you believed; list them: **"_____ "**, and then give them up one at a time with God's help, praying: **Lord God, I give up believing the following lies with your help: "_____ "**. Then seek contextual truths, common sense wisdom that ground the renewal process deep in your heart so one believes with the heart as well as with the mind truth so the lies don't have the same power anymore. Then, ask God to replace the vices with the corresponding opposite virtues. The virtues are God's gifts. Then claim the grace granted in Jesus through faith that enables one to live victoriously, and choose to live like that grace is

¹⁷ Cf. Deuteronomy 31:8

been imparted along with the truth. Jesus won't abandoned us.

The sin should be dealt a blow, but often there can be many roots depending on the history, energy flow in the sin tree structure, and dynamics involved. Each root/ branch needs to be dealt with for the past to be dealt with. This book gives a systematic way to uncover the lies and fears that make certain strongholds in our lives, along with a strategy to dismantle the same strongholds. To do this we need to deal with our bad attitudes in prayer.

WORKING DEFINITION: (for Repenting in Prayer from bad attitudes):

When it comes to unwanted "attitudes" I use the phrase: "**repent in prayer**" to mean praying to Jesus, in the thoroughest sense possible, in clean energy (i.e. in humility and gentleness), using words something like:

Dear God, I give up saying "No!" to my sin attitude(s) self-righteously, and instead I change my mind about and give up, in faith with your help, the sinful attitude of:

"_____" (i.e. self-pity, demandingness, fear, pride (superiority, or I am most important), arrogance, conceit, lust (uncaring), envy (inferiority), coveting, selfishness, jealousy, judging (resentment), anger, hatred, greed (jealousy), legalism, sloth (laziness) or gluttony (emptiness), being anal, being petty, being a jerk...etc.)

with corresponding false beliefs (or lies believed) of "_____" that inspired the bad attitudes and sins in this context, (i.e. "I'm the center of the universe", "I am most important – f—k them", "others need to come last", "I'm better than them", "I'm good and they are bad", "I'm intelligent and they are stupid", "they deserve my scorn, mockery, laughter, wrath, disdain, judging, aggravation, impatience, pettiness, and lack of charity....", or "I deserve fairness more than they do" ... etc.)

and I give up with your help Jesus, the bad motivations/ energy/ expectations of "_____" associated with the attitude (i.e. "unhealthily protecting my identity or self-esteem thinking I am better than others", "expecting myself and demanding from others that I be first", "trying to control people", "expecting others to live foremost according to my values/ morality", coveting power, wealth, or sex; or "I got to get what they have"- thinking, or "it's all about me"- thinking, "I can't do it"- thinking, demanding, grasping, having an active sense of entitlement, "I got to get even"-thinking, despising something about a person or a group of people, hating a person, active superiority, racism, pressure, or manipulation, selling out, betrayal, expectations of perfectionism or other misguided poor ideals...etc.)

as well I give up, with your help Lord Jesus, in faith, the sinful behaviors this inspires such as: "_____" (i.e. making rash vows, wearing masks, seeking revenge, getting even, lashing out, scoffing, cynicism, pouting, negativity, judging, letting walls go up and

pushing people away, or projecting arrogance, uncontrolled anger, hostility, insensitivity, verbal-abuse, and meanness, exerting force or violence, pressuring or manipulating, using lying, stealing, hurting, not taking “no” for an answer, violating boundaries, acting like a jerk, or making waves and demands to get one’s way at all costs, communicating a “me=good, better, intelligent vs. them=bad, worse, stupid”- mindset...etc.) **when I did or said or thought “_____” while relating to the following person(s): “_____”. I’m sorry for wanting to or for actually hurting these people to protect my self image or protect myself against threats or possible hurts.**

I therefore ask you the Holy Spirit to replace these sins in my life with their corresponding opposite virtues “_____” as your gifts to me. I choose to submit my tongue, energy, eyes, ears, mind, body, mechanics, money, possessions, influence, desires, beliefs, and will to you the Living God in your energy and leading through faith in Jesus, to be used for love and not in the service of the sins I have just confessed here.

And, I choose to humble myself seeking to healthily love you God, and the people I meet with your grace and truth Lord Jesus instead, and to not pretend that I'm healthier than what I am, and I ask you the living God to heal me as I accept you Jesus as my Lord, Truth, Savior, Healer, Grace, Peace and Life Giver.

I realized that for decades I tried to motivate inner change, repentance, self-control, and people who annoyed me with my anger. This needs to be abandoned because human anger has nothing to do with the righteousness of God. In other words, this strategy does not work. The good thing though is, we can become aware of such anger in the different contexts of our lives (including our histories) and give it up with Jesus’ help in prayer along with replacing it with gentleness and trust instead. Realizing that anger as a means to change does not work, and instead to move over to clean, healthy, gentle thinking and motivations is life changing. Being hard on oneself because of temptation or while sinning or after sinning is not healthy. This needs to be prayed through so the love of God motivates us instead.

It is crucial to invite, and depend on and believe Jesus for His grace as one tackles life. God has not left us orphans. He is with us. To celebrate grace (God’s empowering presence) just as much as welcoming truth to build up our interior and relational lives is the clincher to being able to live free from the above negative strongholds. We do this by practicing repentance and abiding in Jesus as the Spirit leads. ♥

WORKING DEFINITION (for Giving Up the Attitude of Fear):

♥ To continue the act of repentance we need to drive out our fears (insecurities, and instabilities) completely and allow God's love to flow into us and out of us to others. This requires that the grace of God to be poured into and applied to our lives. This is done best

through friendship with God via "Journaling Prayer" which is the Two-Way Prayer as described and practiced by Mark Virkler.

We all hunger for God, and when we spend time with Him through journaling, and allow His words to penetrate and enter the otherwise stagnant pools of our lives, then His grace accompanies the truth He speaks and we are set free to love and are healed of the deadly streams of energy or bad habits also known as the strongholds talked about in this book.

Specifically, one can pray about fears like we do with bad attitudes. But often fears carry a lot of baggage. Giving up or repenting of fears in prayer more thoroughly is a little different because we are often aware of our fears and naming them helps us to see what is giving them power in our lives. So, here is a way to deal with unreasonable fears in prayer more thoroughly:

Step 1. Talk to God about where you are at, and let Him speak to you through the thoughts in your head.

Step 2. Ask yourself and God what fears that you struggle with that are unreasonable. Write down each fear "_____" (i.e. intimacy, made a fool of, being hurt, losing, going home empty, written off, put in a box, that I won't have what others have, that I will not have friends, being left out or behind, ridiculed, laughed at, not acknowledged, not valued, not cared about...etc.).

Step 3. For each fear ask yourself and the Holy Spirit what lies you are believing behind each fear. Write them down "_____" (i.e. believing: "I'm completely bad" or "I can't do it", or going by: "What if they do such and such negative thing to me?", "there isn't enough for everyone, some might go without, so I have to do everything moral or immoral to get my deserved share or I got use people at all costs to get my way no matter how humiliating it is for them"... etc.) which lead to darkness and not living in the moment and not accepting people where they are at. The possibility of "Yes" is found in Jesus. We must have faith, faith in God, people, and ourselves otherwise we draw negativity to us and live without hope: sowing negativity and reaping negativity. Grace is the most powerful thing in relationships when invited in, because it believes the best about people, and treats them in the healthiest ways possible.

Step 4. Write down what sins you do: "_____" when you entertain each fear and **lie written down;** (like: worrying, pretending, acting, despair, lying, eating, manipulating, trying to control people or their opinions, cheating, being mean, acting like a jerk, play it safe, not taking chances,...etc.) **along with reactions to the fears such as "_____"** (embarrassment, or falling for catch twenty-two's, using faulty thinking, or seeking power out of pride, showing up way too early or too late)

Step 6. Then for each fear/ lie/ sin combination above, pray something like: Lord Jesus I

give up saying “No!” self-righteously to the fears/ lies/ and sins mentioned below, and instead Lord Jesus, I give up the sin of " _____ " and related reactions " _____ " (cf. step 4) with your help through faith in you because they are wrong. I give up believing the lies of " _____ " (cf. step 3) that helped enslave me to the sin of indulging in the unreasonable fears of " _____ " (cf. step 2). I give up this fear with your help and I choose to believe your truth, and embrace the promises found in the Bible, especially the promises of " _____ " (peace, grace, mercy, perfect love casts out all fear, relationship, living waters, never to be forsaken, supply of courage, bravery, having my needs looked after...). I receive your forgiveness for all my sins along with the fulfillment of all these promises (gifts) in my life Lord Jesus that I ask for and receive intellectually, emotionally, and as your beloved child. It must be said though, there may be no hurts, just lies I foolishly believed that inspire my fears. But if there are hurts, then I further pray: I choose to forgive the people " _____ " who hurt me in a way that helps to trigger my fears.

I choose to stand in your grace, and to love people and I choose to now resist the devil and his efforts to nullify the graces given me through you Jesus, and I ask you Jesus to help me renew my thoughts, and beliefs with common sense truth, and the wisdom found in the Scriptures (make up your mind to search for it, ask people what they think, and ask God what He thinks, imagine what it looks like and choose (to commit) to living out the virtues along with bravery through the rich graces Jesus pours into our lives). Thank you for setting me free from these sins Almighty God along with setting me free from indulging in the fears above! I pray this in Jesus' name! Amen!

Often fears are triggered by the unknown, by threats, trauma, and hurt and the above prayers deal with such. But we can accumulate a general ingrained attitude of fear in our minds/ spirits over time that can through pride trigger all the unwanted strongholds spoken about in this book. General accumulated ingrained fears are completely vanquished through journaling prayer in the context of a love relationship with God. Journaling Prayer in this context doesn't mean we necessarily focus on the topics of fear, insecurity, and instability but it can be a good idea. Journaling is broader than just talking about fear or sin. We give God the freedom to direct the conversation as He pleases, and we can ask Him whatever we want because He is kind, gentle, loving, gracious, and compassionate.

Example:

Lord Jesus, I give up my self-righteous “No’s!” to the fears of intimacy and of being hurt; and I instead give up these fears with your help. I choose to give up my cowardice, protectionism, cold-rigidness, not wanting to be honest, being deceptive, and my hiding from people because of my pride. I give up my pride, putting up walls, and me creating

distance from people. I confess these as wrong and ask for your forgiveness and healing, and I receive them emotionally and intellectually through faith as gifts from you the living God. I also forgive my first girlfriend for not respecting me as a person with feelings, dignity, and flaws and for the way I let her hurt me. I choose to love those who cross my path and I accept the pain that accompanies doing so. I ask for the gift of intimacy, courage, and strength to be myself. Thank you for your grace, never leaving my side, and for sustaining your peace within me by your presence, Jesus! Amen! ♥

The strategy to confront negative strongholds is to admit they are in our lives, but to say to them that we don't need them right now because God provides for our needs with His grace, truth, and peace. All sins are done because we come to falsely believe that they will fulfill our needs or save us somehow. Admitting this in each context, and mourning the losses incurred by the sins because the devil promises amount to emptiness in the end, and committing to and connecting with Jesus as Prince of Peace is key to moving on.

We need to do this emotionally as well as intellectually. In this way, we count dead previous strongholds of sin, and embrace the full life promised by Jesus. Nature hates vacuums, so we should replace sin with virtues. Virtues come from clean energy (grace), peace, the presence of God along with healthy truth. The presence of God is the Holy Spirit, we need to ask Him to overcome our sins.

Some attitudes can have many layers or many roots and one needs to be patient until each layer or all roots are eventually dismantled.

Masks and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" go together. Adam and Eve also put on masks after they ate from this tree. They felt shame, and immediately had fears, so they tried to protect themselves with leaf coverings after their innocence was stolen. God knew that would not work, so He chose to shed blood to give them leather skin coverings to help remove their shame, and fears. This shedding is prophetic of Jesus' blood being spilt so that our masks (idols of fear protection) could also be washed away leaving us pure, clean, and able to enjoy rich community once again.

There is fear of being shamed, and then there is fear of people. They aren't always the same. Both need to be dealt with in prayer and renewing one's mind with the promises of grace and truth found in Scripture.

Note, this process of repenting prayer asks us to deal with the lies that we believed in the moments we were seduced to become slaves of certain sins that became strongholds in our lives. These lies are the reasons why certain idols were used by us to try to wrongly satisfy our needs.

For instance, if we were hurt by being rejected, we can be deceived into believing the lie that

through a conceited attitude we will protect our self-images and maintain a sense that we are still likable. Or, we can come to think that sloth is the answer to having peace in our hearts. Or, we can be deceived into thinking that food will give us peace. These idols don't satisfy us, and can be very expensive, besides marring our personalities and bodies; and confusing us about our identities.

Also, the above prayers and strategies are ways of basically committing to a clean conscience with the help of God and committing to renewing the mind, attitudes, expectations, thinking, and beliefs we have through grace in a way that changes one's actions from sin to love in gentle obedience to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

For instance, if we were rejected as young children like I was, we could have vowed to aim hatred and malice at those who rejected us because of the hurt, and at those who later in life seemingly threaten our self-image, identity and sense of safety. This can go very deep and be unhealthily layered in our hearts with meanness, scoffing, scorn, judging, "us=good vs. them=bad"-thinking, negativity, and insensitivity pouring out of us at others when triggered, like I did. But just as sadly and importantly we must realize that this meanness, scoffing, scorn, judging, negativity, and being hard on people can also be directed at ourselves for letting the first rejections happen (and those subsequent). We need to forgive the agents of our hurts, ourselves, and give up our judgments and attacks against God for letting the hurt happen in the first place.

Further, we could have believed the lie like I did that we will be better than others through self-effort, and vowed to be perfect always, and eventually come to believe the lie that we are better than others. This becomes so habitually ingrained within, distorting and defiling our personalities and self-image if not reversed. I have found countering such streams of pride-energy with targeted truth helps much.

I have found that when such a wound goes very deep, situations that challenge my self-image will trigger the sins mentioned in this context towards others, and these sins need to be confessed and repented from in prayer (also dealing with pride, fear, and negativity in this context) and confronted with strategic truth each time they materialize to get rid of the streams of bad energy. But the real cancer is the hatred directed towards oneself within which also needs to be confessed and repented from in genuine prayer. If we hate ourselves, we will hate others.

My words have power for good or bad and using them for good can bring freedom. Sin is no longer my master when Jesus sets me free by His grace and truth flowing through me. This is done gradually area after area with our cooperation. To successfully put to death the sinful attitude we need a clean energy in our prayers, tone of speech, beliefs, thinking, will and efforts

and with it to say “YES” to the corresponding virtuous acts in obedience to Jesus made possible by grace and truth. When we use clean energy, we will see great victories in our emotional life and attitudes. It only takes a little leaven to leaven the whole batch of dough. We can’t throw out negative energy with negative energy. We all have safe places within us no matter how sinful we are where together with faith in Jesus and grace, we can conquer the darkness within with His Light and grace.

Occasionally, we will react with a fleshly attitude, and this should inspire confessing and repenting in prayer but sometimes the emotions of the attitude linger, and one may try to wrestle with it. This last part is counterproductive. One shouldn't think inside the box, or outside the box but without the box. The former two-scenarios give the box (or emotion/attitude) power; whereas the latter does not. The more one focuses on a negative attitude and tries to wrestle with it the more power one gives to it. God says, "not by human might, but by my power". God's power works with truth, and sets us free.

After dealing with visible sins, the vices (pride, lust, coveting, envy...etc.), and fears thoroughly through prayer, the next step is to forgive the people who hurt us contextually.

Sometimes I’ve prayed like suggested in this book but it did not bring complete freedom in an area. When this happens, then I know that I got to go deeper...and I’m usually missing one or more truths needed to push the devil more completely out of my life in the troublesome area.

WORKING DEFINITION (for forgiveness):

♥ When we humans choose to forgive somebody, we are jettisoning our bad energy towards the person and choosing good energy towards them instead. This is what it means to have a pure heart. We don’t even have to use the words: “I forgive you” with them, but we can just decide to give up the hardness, give up the blackness, give up the coldness, give up the un-grace, give up judging them, give up not loving the person in our hearts, and instead saying “Yes” to loving the person with clean energy and refusing to bring up the past because we have forgiven them from our hearts. This is based on living out the “golden rule” together with “grace”: we want unconditional love (i.e. grace) so we grant the same grace to everyone. When it comes to judging someone, who did us wrong, this kind of forgiveness is most needed, otherwise we are wounded. We forgive for our own sake. If we don’t forgive people who piss us off, it won't necessarily affect their destiny, but it will affect ours. I choose to forgive others because it is healthy for me to do so, and because I “really” want to be a good person. I can't be a good person if I cut off my love from anyone. ♥

I can't be friends with everyone. Yes, I am called to forgive everyone who sins against me, but if they are toxic, unkind, judgmental, and uncaring and basically rub me with friction or the wrong way all the time, then a friendship just is not practical. I get to choose my friends; I don't have to

be friends with someone just because they want it. Forgiveness yes, but friends not always.

This goes both ways. Not everyone wants to be my friend. Accepting this is very healthy both generally and particularly. Hanging around others hoping they will notice me and pretending they aren't ignoring me needs to be abandoned, given up in prayer, and processed so I can move on. Love does not demand to be loved by others.

When I have been hurt, Satan floods my mind with fear, lies, and judgments that are designed to get me to form resentments. These, help to grow the tree of knowledge of good and evil within me. Forgiving those involved, forgiving self, and giving up judging and attacking God will invite grace, healing, peace, warmth, love, and caring into my heart and help me to dismantle the tree within so love can thrive.

Moreover, sometimes it seems impossible to forgive no matter how much I wrestle with doing so, I have found that when this happens the issue is not so much that, "I can't forgive", but to repent from my conceit. Pride blocks me from forgiving others.

It is crucial that I capture the full essence of my thinking/ emotions/ bad and good attitudes/ sins/ fears/ reasoning/ and resentments on paper when it comes to processing compulsions/ baggage/ annoyances/ unforgiveness/ heartache/ and confusion so that I can take it to God in order for Him to give me healing through His touches/ insights/ truth/ wisdom/ and grace as I confess and repent in faith from my sins and make adjustments to my paradigms, and expectations so that the tree of knowledge of good and evil within me will be dismantled. After I have done this, then using "I"- statements to renew my thinking is the next wise thing to do.

Giving up my judgments of the persons who wronged me paves the way to easily forgive them from my heart. A way of uprooting further judgments towards people who have hurt or violated me is for me to use "I"-statements.

WORKING DEFINITION (for "I"-statements):

♥ "I"- statements follow the formula:

"I feel " _____ " when " _____ " because " _____ ", and would like " _____ "

and they are to be simple, none-threatening, none accusing, non-judgmental, without putdowns, and without name calling. ♥

"I"- statements are meant to be used after I confess and repent from judgments, resentments, hostility, and hatred directed at people so I don't rebuild the tree of knowledge of good and evil within.

"I"-statements help me to start to renew my heart and mind's feelings, sense of injustices, motivations, and my sinful or confused attitudes. They help me move away from judging and

hurting others, and to become healers and lovers instead.

"I"-statements are specifically meant for myself to help me process personal stuff (they move me from judging to truth telling); they don't need to always be spoken to the persons I am having difficulty with, but I can speak it to him or her when prompted by God. There is grace, I don't have to confront everyone who offends me to demand justice.

WORKING DEFINITION (for Holiness):

♥ Since the NT is written to the "holy ones" and all the letters have much advice, wisdom, and correction regarding sinful acts; this means the holy ones' actions weren't always holy but they themselves were holy in God's eyes. Therefore, they are in a holy position because of their faith in Jesus since God dwells within them but they need to become holy in their actions. For those of us who consider ourselves Jesus' disciples we can't make ourselves holy independently of God, but we can make our actions holy¹⁸ through faith in and cooperation with the Holy Spirit. So, when the NT writers call us to be holy they mean to become healthy in our thinking, believing, attitudes, behaviors, deeds, speech, and acts. This is the meaning of: "Be Holy for I [God] am Holy" that Peter mentions in his first letter. True holiness comes from being dependent on God through His grace and trust in Him, it isn't something we just decide to do and become through our own energy. ♥

The aim of holiness is to live healthily. That means doing what I was hardwired for. Jesus commanded me to live out the Golden Rule which says: "do to others what I want done to myself." This does not mean that I assume that what makes me happy to be the same thing that makes others happy. Everyone gets to decide what makes themselves happy. But, the Golden Rule does mean that I love others unconditionally because I want to be loved unconditionally. This means that I love people whether or not they do good, do bad, or have apathy.

If I am to obey Jesus' commands, like the Golden Rule for instance, and not just call Him "Lord, Lord" without doing what He asks, then I need to be free enough to do so. To do it I need to draw from Jesus' peace and energy without pressure and force. The devil can and does quote the same scriptures to me too, but they become Law and not liberating truth because the devil has a mean, disrespectful, restless, pressurized, and "I got a whip in my hand so do what I say" dark dry energy about him. Jesus though, is gentle, kind, respectful, and asks us to obey Him with a peaceful yet authoritative energized presence. The devil appeals to my guilt, fear, pride and desires for perfectionism, whereas Jesus appeals to that part of me that cares and believes in Him and wants His will done.

I can adopt either of these mentalities when I attempt to speak to myself and others or also

¹⁸ cf. 1 Peter 1:13-15

when I attempt to motivate my or other people's actions. But if I choose to heed or copy the devil's voice I won't ever keep Jesus' commands gently and I will drown in negativity, dryness, anger, "it's my right"- kind-of-anger, "it isn't fair", "poor-me", "woe-is-me", and "I can't do it" - thinking with sour and bitter emotions and attitudes; with no healthy actions to show for any of it. But when I choose Jesus' peaceful clean energy poured into my heart by listening to Jesus voice (and speaking to myself like He does with me), His peace will come with power so that I will be able to love like He commands. This does not come from intellectual-analyzing of things...it comes from caring, faith, wisdom, and the desire to love people like Jesus does.

How do I know to whom I am listening to or copying? When I ask people to "believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior", do I do so in a "hard, abrasive, dry, "you-better or you are damned, you got no choice in the matter", with an overly serious tone? If so, then I got Jesus confused with someone else. Jesus has healthy speech, warmth, kindness, clean energy and emotions; He respects that people have a choice in the matter of His invitations, and He is not abrasive, hard, and mean, or over-bearing.

I need to process my thoughts/ emotions in prayer, reasoning together with God, and get to the place where I call Jesus "Lord" with healthy respect, firmness, being at peace with who He is, with a clean conscience, knowing Him as caring, loyal and kind; and not giving people the impression that He is heartlessly demanding, spiteful, judgmental, or spiritually constipated.

Fully believing in Jesus means I see Him as He is portrayed in the New Testament. It means that I have not laminated a darkness on to Him in my mind. It means that I respect Him as Leader, Shepherd, Brother, King, Lord, anointed one, Son of God, and as fully God and as fully man. It means to not buy any lies from the devil about Jesus. When we do this, Jesus' promise that living waters would flow within us becomes true.

WORKING DEFINITION (for Submission & Resisting):

♥ What does: "Submitting to God and resisting the devil" so that "the devil will flee" mean? It is very important in cementing victory in the spiritual life. The "submission" part means we accept and commit to God's will (the good, the bad and the ugly in life), desire God's will, pray for God's will, and say yes to God's will above our own wills whole-heartedly, firmly; and not superficially, and not flimsily. The "resisting the devil" part means we say, "I don't need your empty promises Satan", countering his lies with strategic truth, and saying, "yes" to the grace and life giver: Jesus who gives His Holy Spirit generously. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to overcome our sin, for there to be victory.

Healthy submission to God, spouses, and human authority means that in the face of persecution, hurts, violence, abuse, anger, and conflict to not return evil for evil, or hurt for hurt, but to follow the way of non violence as a pathway to conflict resolution. This is what Jesus

did.

We can't submit to God in our own strength. God willingly strengthens us when we recognize we can't do it without Him and we ask Him to help us. When we begin to judge God, we lose grace, strength, and fellowship and come under the devil's influence unable to supernaturally love. ♥

Giving up commitments to use anger and bad attitudes and energies is one way to resist the devil, and committing to the opposite of the vices, namely virtues (healthy attitudes) in prayer will help bring about healthy behaviors and is seen as submitting to God.

Exalting myself or my opinions over that which is written in the New Testament Bible is very unhealthy for me a child of God. It means I have cut myself off or are in the process of cutting myself off from hearing God speak powerfully to me for my comfort, health, direction, and discipline (correction), and so miss out on peace, grace, friendship, learning, and intimacy with God that comes through faith in Jesus. It also means I am not fully submitting to God, and so will have problems "resisting the devil" and so he will not flee from me like I would desire.

5 EXPANDING MY UNDERSTANDING ON HOW TO DISMANTLE THE UNWANTED TREE WITHIN ME

I observed one morning that when I prayed rote prayers like: “The Lord's Prayer”, “The Serenity Prayer”, and especially “The Prayer to the Holy Spirit”, that I said it with the expectation and request that all the unpleasantness, the yucky emotions/ dark energy streams inside of me would somehow not be felt by me. I prayed it because I feared this darkness and what it could do; and whenever it peeped out I tried to push it back down. Realizing that praying this way is unhealthy is half the problem. I realized later that I needed to give up this expectation in my heart too. Attempting to push the darkness down within is unhealthy, because in doing so it also keeps “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” intact, hidden, and very powerful.

Truth is, if I don't allow myself to feel the negative emotions/ dark energy streams/ attitudes when present, such as selfishness, greed, pride, coveting, envy, lust...etc., then:

- 1) I won't be able to process them and get rid of them for good,
- 2) I am saying no to the positive emotions/ energy (grace)/ attitudes too because it along with the dark energy comes from the same source: my heart. I realized I can't stand on top of my emotions like a moral policeman suppressing negative emotion/ bad energy repeatedly, I just get numb, out of touch, lose focus, and disorientated by doing that, and
- 3) I land up being an actor or hypocrite because my heart doesn't change and I only look clean on the outside.

If I don't push down on the negative emotional attitudes, then they are going to be felt by me and that is a healthy thing because, then God and I can process them together. That does not mean I speak it out, or act it out against people because, then I'd hurt them by it. But when I deal with it wisely like suggested in this book, it will eventually be cleaned up one area at a time. Ignoring my negative attitudes and trying to focus on the positive keeps us from cleaning the inside of the cup so the whole cup remains dirty like Jesus warned us to keep from doing.

It is not wise to rush processing one's emotions. Sometimes I can quickly process them, but not always. The less congested I am with malice, bad energy streams, bad attitudes, resentments, and making judgments the quicker I will recognize where I am at and what needs to be done because Christ's light shines more fully into my conscience and through me.

However, as the renewal process advances, sometimes we will get frustrated because of our confusion. This is a healthy sign that we are moving in the right direction, and just stepping back and jettisoning the confusion like water off a duck's back is the healthiest thing to do, or to walk through it until we come to see the truth more clearly. We don't have to control and understand everything. Recommitting to trust in Jesus to save us from our sins, and walking in grace through

faith (not sight) will get us to clarity of mind, and real renewal more so than trying to wrestle with it all. Understanding comes gradually.

When I am aware of the “sin nature” or flesh within me (i.e. it uses anger or self-pity to get its way), I know it can't submit to the Spirit but frustrates love. It is sinful, corrupt, selfish, and insecure and tries to push me away from living humbly and with self-control. Knowing the sin nature won't die in this life keeps me humble because I know it is with me as it is with every other fallible human. I come to see that I am no higher than anyone else: we all have this “sin nature” or “flesh” to deal with; no matter how spiritual we are or how hard we try to live holy lives. This book is my attempt to show how I am learning to have victory over the “sin nature” one battle at a time.

We know we have a stronghold of sin when it is compulsive and hard to shake off; and threatens to hurt a relationship. The first line of attack is confession, then repentance in prayer. Then when the stronghold is removed from the heart, the heart/ mind need to be renewed and softened in this area as per the strategies found in chapter four.

Practicing the Golden Rule is not “fully possible” until the roots and branches of the tree of knowledge of good and evil are killed or dismantled within us. But also, when we have any resentments against anybody, then we will have problems practicing the Golden Rule as well and the bad fruit will persist, and pride won't be defeated until we forgive whomever we need to from our hearts.

It should be noted that confession and repenting in prayer deal with our ties to the past (distant and recent when applicable) and present struggles in all contexts found in this book. They deal with our guilt and baggage for good, and open our eyes to a healthier way to process our emotions, beliefs, and thinking. Jesus is that better and healthy way. Jesus helps us aim so high that the negative, poor-me, self-pitying, demanding, selfish-me-centered, perfectionistic, angry and judgmental fleshly tree-structure is replaced with love, positivity, kindness, generosity, and gentleness by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said that, “those who keep his words, are truly His disciples, they will know the truth, and the truth will set them free”¹⁹. This is a promise, and Jesus always keeps his promises, provided we hold onto them. When the past is dealt with through confession, and repentance in prayer we are forgiven and given new opportunities to grow the fruit of the Spirit. As we forge ahead, we continue to confess and repent in prayer, renewing the attitudes and expectations of our minds with Jesus' presence/ teaching/ truth/ grace/ commands/ and promises and choosing to put them into practice daily. The New Testament has so much truth, and all of it will help us to be set free through the Spirit's leading. When we get stuck which can happen depending on

¹⁹ John 8:32

how strong the battle is, just asking the Holy Spirit to heal our minds and then resting in His faithfulness and grace is key to victory. God will never leave us nor forsake us. He will complete the work He began in us.

§ 5.2: DEALING WITH SOME GIANTS OR BAD ATTITUDES:

Feeling sorry for oneself can be triggered by unmet expectations. But when we try to use self-pity to get our own way then it is immature and it works together with demandingness and pride in growing the rest of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in one's life. Being able in prayer with Jesus' help, to give up this unhealthy attitude is one key to being free from acting out pride. Sometimes we need to give up our expectations to be free from self-pity too.

Grace and truth are key to removing self-pity and gaining the joy of one's salvation (back). Confessing my self-pity, repenting of it in prayer (by giving up the (lie, judgment or) mentality that "I'm the center of the universe...so give me my way") and celebrating Jesus' grace and truth instead are keys to warming up my emotions and enabling me to relate with people in mature ways instead of trying to use self-pity and demandingness to get my way all the time.

As for renewing my mind or repenting from using self-pity, when I start going to a place of self-pity I can fight it off by recognizing self-pity's purpose and instead choosing to replace it with loving the people in the situations that are triggering my self-pity. Self-pity is what kept many of the Israelites from entering the Promised Land. Choosing to love, in attitude, in clean energy (or grace) and in action protects me from giving in to self-pity.

When asked to do stuff that is altruistic in nature, the natural thing to do for one who is not far in love is to pout, sulk, and become full of self-pity because one's pride is hurt and one doesn't feel honored (i.e. having conceit) since one was asked to do something that one knows one ought to have done. This can be very ugly when not hidden from others.

Mourning, shedding tears and weeping is natural when real injustices happen. But everyone will have different opinions on what are violation, or injustices. A healthy spiritual person won't go to a place of self-pity together with angry pressure because they do go the extra mile, care for, and love people.

Self-pity can spring up in all our relationships: at work, play, in friendships, families, marriages, and travels or commutes; and from things that are denied us. Grace and truth help to fortify us from giving into self-pity which comes from our will and "sin nature" possibly developing into a habit.

When I feel powerful self-pity in the context of hurt feelings (when people seemingly ignore me or are cold towards me) I know I am struggling with conceit too (along with trust issues, judging, manipulative and demanding - tendencies and pride) and need to pray about my conceit along

with all the baggage mentioned as outlined here...and to be open to the wisdom and grace from above that will fortify my mind and prevent me from falling into the ruts of fleshly blindness again, then to submit to God and resist the devil in liberating grace.

As I persevere in these tactics, I am making progress towards freedom. Yes, there have been dramatic results for me, but usually they are followed by newer challenges. For me being the proudest person on earth for the longest time the results have usually been felt observably gradual, gradually, and observably gradual. There have been very dramatic results for me at times...but not all the time. Giving time for the Holy Spirit to help me process my beliefs, feelings, thinking, and attitudes and giving myself time to grow in the positive virtues is very important. Often self-pity has sprung up on many fronts in one's relational life and it will take time to sort the triggers out, but it will be sorted out eventually because God's promises can route the enemy's strongholds when one cooperates with God through grace.

I have found that defending against and attacking our sour-attitudes is best done in dialogue with God, as I experience these negative mind-sets, by first confessing and repenting in faith from my sins, then using "I"-statements to renew the mind, and then committing to living out the Golden Rule (and other necessary New Testament commands) by submitting to God, resisting the devil, and seeking healthy, clean, and pure responses in navigating my relationships all through grace and truth. Jesus won't ever leave us or forsake us.

§ 5.3: HEALING BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD AND PEOPLE:

As for relationships with God, none are "absolutely" healthy, and many are dead, so there is always room for growth and resurrection. Sin and guilt are the source to a broken relationship with God. Most of the healing we can experience comes from dealing healthily with sin and guilt through grace and truth. Not wanting to love, or pay the price to love brings guilt and weakens or breaks connection with God and grows "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within me. So, deciding to commit to love through God's forgiveness and grace and caring about people instead helps to mend my relationship with God. If I refuse to love people, I refuse to love God.

Unforgiveness, coveting, envy, believing lies, judging, pride, and resentments can all be walls that keep God and people out of our lives. Putting one's faith humbly in Jesus and receiving His grace is the start and foundation from which to live, forgive, be forgiven, and successfully give up sin strongholds. But one must forgive for the hurt, or wound to be healed. Without forgiveness, there is no freedom.

Relationships are often broken because we believe lies. Adam and Eve's relationships with God and each other were damaged because they began believing the lies from the devil. To dismantle the structure within, I need to let God through prayer expose the lies I believe, and replace them with truth. The truth always sets free. I also need to repent in prayer from acting

out the sin that comes from the lies I believed.

I have come to realize that I can't rush this process, and it is a good idea to pray through my baggage in Jesus' name in whatever areas God brings to my mind, to establish a firm foundation from which I see God as good, kind, patient, and compassionate through which I can tackle the rest of the strongholds in my life through this book. When I've prayed to God renouncing my idols that I previously had put in place of God, then I need to remember that I did so because I wanted peace but the idols I chose could not satisfy my hunger and thirst for this good thing: "the peace of God". Often, I wrongly look for "peace" with certain parts of my body. If I have gluttony in my life for instance, then feeling the location that most gives pleasure when eating is where I am seeking my "peace." If this is the case, then to give up seeking peace in that place through prayer is the place to start, and then to invite God's peace into my life instead.

It is only fitting that when we worship God one of the things we can do is call Him "Our Peace" and accept Him in faith. But all this can be done in vain if we don't nurture our relationships with God. To do this we need to seek God with all our hearts and this means spending time with God, speaking with Him, listening, and giving up other distractions and pursuits that would seek to supplant relationship with God. Journaling is the best way to nurture our relationships with God. Reading theology or self-help books do not count as friendship time spent with God, even though they can be beneficial in many ways. Relationship is not only knowing about somebody, but interacting with somebody in a meaningful and connecting way.

Jesus said that He is the true Vine and that we are the branches. His life or grace should flow into us. When we abide in Him, then His life flows into that God shaped vacuum that has an appetite and thirst for God. We must abide in Him with Him in us, if we are to bear good fruit. To abide in Jesus means to humble oneself and jettison through prayer the idols (we are aware of) so the life and grace of Jesus can fully sustain us. Next, to abide in Jesus means our allegiance belongs to Him and not to the world, the devil, and the flesh. When God teaches us something we need to hold onto it. When people tell us something contrary to the Good News then that is the world's message that we ought to reject lovingly, gently, patiently, respectfully, and caringly; not judgmentally, coldly, meanly, angrily, hostilely, in ugliness, hatefully, or with cold hard walls going up.

"The tree of knowledge of good and evil" when mature leads to much idol worship and has competed for my devotion and time that I would otherwise have given to God. In dismantling this horrible structure through faith in Jesus with the tools developed in this book I am growing in my relationship with God and people.

Note, the devils try to attract us with idols and not with themselves because the things in this world still reflect a part of God's glory, but the devils do not because the devils are ugly and we

are not attracted to them. A devil's only power is in its lying tongue trying to make us fear or covet things with empty promises so we will land up worshipping those idols that separates us from God's warmth.

Throughout each day, I can encounter situations that baffle me, and seem to dry up the soft places in my heart turning me into a cold, dry, judgmental and abrasive person interiorly even though outwardly I wear masks to keep peace, or to do damage control. When this happens, I find that talking to God about it in conversation is where to start. It is always the place to start. God may first point out unforgiveness in my heart that needs to be dealt with, or the fears triggered by certain lies I believed that need to be replaced with truth. Or, to healthily own my anger because of injustices (such is not sinful). Or, to invite grace more fully into my life. If these don't fully help, then a healthy thing to do is go deeper with Jesus' light into our hearts and use the tools He has provided as He directs. The tools mentioned here are all found in the New Testament but brought together to provide a focused strategy to conquer sin and to grow people love.

Saint Paul says somewhere in his letters to pray without ceasing. What does he mean? Does he mean to just make requests and petitions and stuff like that all day long? I don't think so; that is too needy, too one-way, too self-centered, and makes God into the local vending machine. I have noticed that for a long time my approach had been to pray asking for stuff only when I got into trouble...with the rest of the time just having long conversations with myself, relying on what I knew, believed, mixed up with fear, blind spots, and often being out to lunch or off topic when it comes to what needed to be dealt with. When this happens the thing to do is give up trying to heal myself all by myself in my own energy and instead trust God's promises and invitation to hear His voice.

I now realize that instead of having a conversation with myself all day long, I can have one with the Holy Spirit. And you know what? The ideas and truths that come to mind when I do so are so freeing, calming, and so needed that I know they have come from God, because no amount of my analyzing, scratching my head, and taking leaps in logic have ever given me something so wholesome to hang onto like what the Holy Spirit gives. I have a choice: either a stagnant pond or a life-giving stream flowing into my interior life.

We all need a focus to have direction in life. Knowing, being able to sense the tone, the energy, the attitude, the grace, the truth, and the authority of Jesus' voice and listening to Him brings a peace the world cannot give, and the correct and healthy disposition necessary to walk in this, the valley of the shadow of death. When we start talking to ourselves like Jesus does to us, then we "really" start loving ourselves healthily.

In becoming aware of the connections between the building blocks from "the tree of knowledge

of good and evil” I find it best to look at my bad fruit and ask what fear(s) motivate them, and ask the Holy Spirit what lies motivate or keep the tree structure together through fear within me. Once the connections are realized and hit home it is time to dismantle them through grace and strategic prayer, with less confusion, and more truth. This involves confessing my sins/ bad attitudes/ bad energy/ and fears, and repenting in prayer with grace from them, working upwards through the tree diagram. This keeps the guessing and frustration to a minimum, and helps me to find and dismantle the real motivations/ roots for my sin strongholds in less time, and so to find freedom to love people more deeply.

When confusion, and fleshly energy operate in the present know that either the past is not fully dealt with or there is something in the present not right. When we have problems navigating a relationship then it can be that we are embracing unhealthy beliefs about the person in question. If our beliefs lead us to unwholesome energy directed towards the person, then we need to examine our beliefs with Jesus’ help. If we are compulsively judging, then the truth that the line between good and evil goes through each person’s soul and does not divide communities, groups, political parties, or religions may do away with the inner conflict.

When we have been hurt or wounded that is where the devil promises stuff that seems justified; however, the devil’s promises are always empty, robbing people of their true humanity. Intense fear and confusion go together and cloud one's judgments and lead to thinking one is saving oneself by holding onto the power and promises from the dark side. The devil promises power and tries to justify everyone's sense of injustice or unfairness to win them over to permanent resentments. This needs to be prayed through thoroughly for grace, truth, healing and freedom to flourish and thrive instead.

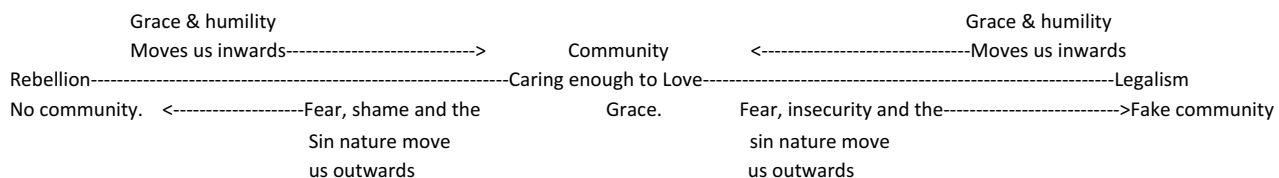
6 EXPLAINING & HEALING FEAR

When a relationship with God is broken in some way, fear comes into play because we too often listen to the devil's lies and don't recognize God's truth because of disconnects. Fear is a building block to "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within. Fear has much destructive power and can move me to where a sane person would not tread.

Satan uses fear to try to paralyze me with the lie: "You can't do it!" This lie robs me from going the extra mile, from living out: "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me."²⁰ Recognizing this lie, and giving it up in prayer through faith, whether it is a conscious or subconscious belief, when I have it, and embracing the contextual corresponding truths is the healthy path to take.

Below are two-continuums. In between these is where spiritually healthy individuals embrace grace and love and can form real community. As a person becomes more fear driven out of insecurity he or she will move away from the center to the right towards legalism; or, if they become driven by shame they will move away from the center to the left towards rebellion in the diagram below. Unreasonable fears are always rooted in lies about relationships, self-images, and identities.

But, when grace and humility are practiced (which means truth not judging is embraced) they move us away from the extremes of legalism and rebellion towards the center. And when we experience grace in the form of caring we can easily move to the center where real community exists.



The "sin nature" within each of us provides the energy and pull to move one away from the centre towards the extremes along either continuum through fear, insecurity, shame, and anger when we let it. These extremes of rebellion and legalism aren't absolute or complete, but are perversions of what "safety" looks like in a healthy community. No community seems "really" safe to those who are hurt or have been threatened with shame because trust only comes when people know they are cared about. Fake community results from those willing to do anything to belong out of insecurity and see obeying rules as the way to belong.

²⁰ Philippians 4:13

All Christian communities on earth are not perfect, so when shit and injustices happen within, and we don't rely on God's truth, grace and love we move towards either rebellion or legalism because then we don't fully embrace giving forgiveness, grace, mercy, love and tolerance to those within the community. And the community we may have belonged to did not grant us enough grace and mercy either.

Rebellion means we don't want rules (or the rules from our former community), and out of anger we want self-determination and so become the captains of our own ships, and maybe even toy with the idea of being our own gods. We may do so because we want to be strong in the eyes of others and not show our fears or be the objects of shame and ridicule. Some who slowly rebel against the community begin to play around with the idea of hating their former home and for what it stands for.

When we have legalism, then it means we feel insecure, and this moves us to seeking security through rule keeping which leads to measuring and focusing on performance. In this context, the rules slowly become more important than the people in the community. Infractions of the rules will cause guilt in the offenders but anger, judging, meanness, and hatred from the legalistic members, and the possibility of discipline or rejection from the colder group leaders and this prompts a "try harder and do more" mentality to avoid pain and judging from the guilty party. The rule keeping will be done more and more out of angry pressure and fear as time goes by. The rules will initially look something like fairness or love, but the practices, energy and interpretations will focus more on conformity based in fear than the unconditional love found in genuine healthy communities as time goes by. No person is perfect, so those people from the group who are legalists will do a lot of pretending; therefore, there is plenty of hypocrisy within, and the fake community will persist in its unhealthy relating style.

The above discussion deals with when fear is present. But when there is no fear felt or a person isn't in touch with her or his fear, then a person may be in denial pretending nothing happened. They are stuck, and need help getting unstuck.

Legalism holds people to anal standards impossible to keep in ways most sane people wouldn't imagine. The legalists are often full of self-pity, anger, fear, and are miserable when something challenges their smooth ride or schedule.

Only grace and humility in the context of truth can free us from the deadly mixture of legalism and rebellion. Freedom and the herd-instinct are very strong God given-drives within our makeup. When trauma or threats come our way, then our reactions can become tainted, knotted, hard, and knit together in the form of rebellion and legalism because we are willing to do anything in our power to stop or avoid the hurt, and to rid ourselves of confusion or threats to our identity, self-esteem, and security. This needs to be addressed with God's wisdom and

grace.

I had rebellion fused with legalism in my makeup because of how two authority figures (both teachers in grade school) tried to humiliate me by making me an example. I realized that I needed to forgive them (that I did) and I needed to learn what healthy and unhealthy herd instincts are.

Healthy herd instinct happens when a member of the herd listens to and follows the whole community when they hold to truth and grace. Each member of the herd has something to contribute, but each member is also dependent on the input from the rest of the herd and welcomes input when needed.

To have freedom means one is not being compulsive in one's behavior, or being coerced, threatened or forced by others to be loyal through fear of demonizing or ostracizing. In healthy groups one stays connected because of mutual respect, honor, and care; and because one is loved, valued, and seen as having dignity.

§ 6.2: DIFFERENT FEARS:

We are all hungry and thirsty people. We all have earthly appetites and spiritual appetites. When we don't know how our needs or wants are going to be supplied then we can have plenty of fear. Fear pushes us either to God, or it pushes us to solving our own problems through our own "know-how," "creativity" and "energy" independently of Him. When we choose unbelief, and ignore God we will use pride to meet our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. It is what we do with our fear that matters. Simply giving up the fear and believing God for His ever-helping-presence and His provisions in prayer is the wise path to take, and helps kill the life belonging to the rest of "tree of knowledge of good and evil" within us. The less fear within us the more we are rooted in love.

There are other fears such as having to pay the price for certain actions, having to wait for people, to be inconvenienced, not getting attention or recognition, not getting one's way, having to work or sacrifice and sweat to earn a living, or having to commit to loving a person or group of people who we don't like. Working to give up these fears is wise.

Fears of the known and unknown can also be powerful motivators (especially in creating judging²¹). If we are unhealthily angry it often is because of fear because fear produces all the vices that, in turn produce all sorts of anger and judging. If we have a severed relationship with God, we will attempt to do many things apart from Him out of fear. And we will (seek to) give ourselves the credit for our happy results; blame God when stuff goes wrong, and we will use methodologies that are not only unhealthy but are harmful and independent from God's grace.

²¹ Grateful to my friend Anita for this insight!

Such methods of action do kill supernatural unconditional love also known as “grace”.

God “really” wants to help us so He does everything in His power to restore us to Himself. The fears we have need to be dealt with through God’s presence, grace, truth, and promises through prayer and walking in faith.

Giving up our fears in prayer is done by meeting them head on, and confronting them with common sense truth, biblical truth, God’s promises, and intellectually and emotionally embracing God’s unconditional love or grace. Making a list of fears, and praying through them is key. Love casts out all unreasonable fears with truth that is positive, humble, respects boundaries and starts healthy believing and thinking based on the love touch of God.

This does not mean that we ought to act like suckers, or parasites towards the people in our lives to get love, and feel love; love sets people free. It is not wise to pray: “Jesus, I wish you were my meaning and peace (as well as life and joy).” But it is wise to regularly make lists of “unreasonable” fears and pray them out loud like shown in Chapter Four from this book, and then to invoke the promises found in Scripture that push our fears away. When we do the latter, we are opening the doors of grace and faith, putting to death our fears by changing what we believe, and giving God His rightful place: Him being at the center of our lives.

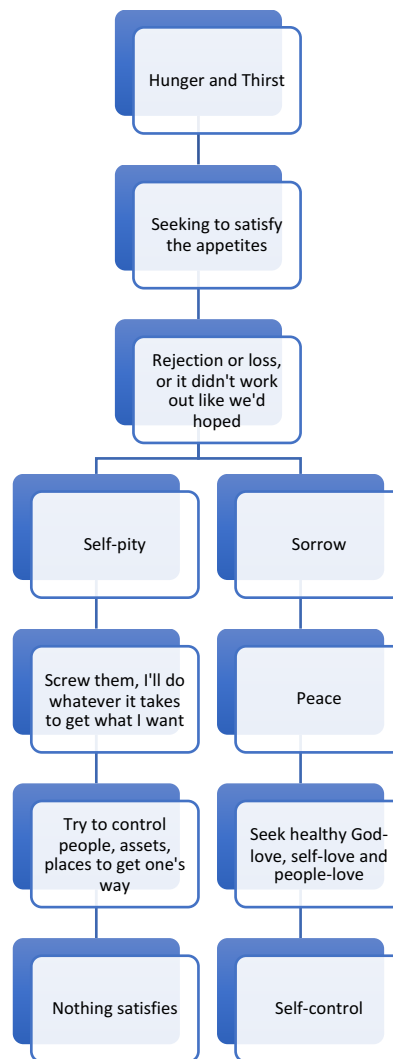
Now, it is true that love casts out all fear. When we know that we are loved then the accusations in our heads that question that love will easily be deflected with our shields of faith or trust. Fear is crippling when it turns into self-pity, worry, cowardice and conceitedness. Knowing who God is and who we are in Him is very important when it comes to listening to our intuitions. Listening to our spirits when they say trust or don’t trust a person in our lives will give peace and remove fears that otherwise could drive us crazy and paranoid. Listening to the Holy Spirit is also important, along with reading and understanding the Holy Scriptures. All relationships are based on trust, or the lack thereof.

Giving up a fear by committing to God’s grace and saying to the fear, “I give you up through God’s grace” is wiser than just trying to say to it, “No”. The former is freeing, whereas, the latter tries to use force usually ending in a power struggle with the flesh being given a stronger in-our-face-presence with more temptation in our backyards spiritually speaking. Making this switch in how we speak to our “fears” along with all “sins” can be life altering.

§ 6.3: HEALING FEAR & SELF-PITY:

Fear can motivate the use of self-pity because of loss, supposed unfairness, and possible broken promises. We can go around searching for healthy ways to feed our appetites, but when they aren’t satisfied through God or spouses, or parents, or children, or friends, or coworkers, or employers or people who cross our paths every day for whatever reasons, then either we move to sorrow or self-pity because of the seeming-unfairness. If we move to sorrow (which means

feeling sad and sorry for those who don't care or refuse to come through for our just cause), then we will move to peace, love and then self-control and won't look for unhealthy ways to get our hunger and thirsts met. If we move to self-pity we will move to trying to control others or whatever is at our disposal in unhealthy ways to get our way. These thoughts are summarized in the diagram:



Self-pity believes we are all alone, and no one cares, not even God. So, self-pity cuts away our faith in people and God. Self-pity leads to despair, anger and jettisoning of relationships that do not satisfy.

Jesus said that He had food that His disciples knew nothing about. His food was to do the will of

His Father. Jesus is saying that there are real rewards like meaning, purpose, happiness, and fulfillment in healthily seeking to do and accomplish what God desires from us, and these are more satisfying than instant gratification or earthly hunger and thirsts. Love does not seek its own in any relationship. We are wired for altruism, nobleness, and honor because we are made in the image of God despite being infected with the “sin nature”. The “sin nature” opposes the noble side God grants us at conception.

There is a real difference in godly sorrow versus self-pity. Sorrow is selfless-rational-sadness. Self-pity is self-centered-irrational-sadness. Self-pity can lead to suicide, whereas sorrow leads to giving one’s life so that others can live. So, self-pity goes to the point of possibly taking life; whereas godly sorrow feels sad for others and seeks to give life instead of erecting walls.

People who can't take a perfectly good “No!” for an answer to a request will sulk and have plenty of self-pity if they don't take by force what they covet/ or demand. Learning to accept awkward people, situations, and unfairness in life, and giving people the right to refuse will transform one’s “it’s about ME” attitude into humility and love. I know that when I've got a massive bout of self-pity in a situation, then the healthy thing to do is trade in that self-pity for love...by that I mean deciding to change my poor-me attitude through grace and truth to loving those who helped triggered the self-pity in me by moving my attitude and will to embrace the BIG picture: POSITIVE-LOVE, and to give up the lies the Lord leads me to give up. So, when I encounter self-pity it is always an opportunity to grow in love.

Realizing any bad structure (dark energy stream) in me when it rears its ugly head in my consciousness means I have an opportunity to change with God’s help. I need to repent in prayer from bad structures within; and say, “yes” to healthier structures through believing truth over lies. A healthy relationship with God/ Jesus is the only way to conquer and dismantle my dead structures within. It is in the context of relationship with Jesus, community, and prayer where we find positive change.

§ 6.4: BOXED IN SELF-PITY:

Sometimes as a child we may have taken every disappointment really hard and cried a lot, with an insensitive parent or teacher coming along making fun of us by calling us hurtful names, perhaps trying to turn us into fully-grown men or women instead by insults. Our reaction could be to resist the name calling by saying "No" to it, but in doing so it creates a box that we will try to box our way out of the rest of our lives or until the truth sets us free.

When a child has the habit of always crying, when the child becomes an adult, then the adult may struggle with self-pity, with the expectation that the worst will always happen, and this makes the person very negative and needy. The only way out of this box is to give up saying "No" to it with Jesus' help, and instead to give it up in faith with Jesus' help the "crying, and the

self-pity"; along with forgiving the parent or teacher from one's heart. A way to do this is to say, "I accept that you 'self-pity' are a part of my old life, but I don't need you right now", and to then pray to give it up with Jesus' help through faith...telling Jesus that His grace is more desirable and to choose to do His will instead!"

One will then have to renew one's mind/ heart as per the strategy found in chapter four, believe that one can handle maturely whatever negative things life throws one's way by recognizing that, "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me."²² Because it is one's faith that enables one to overcome the world. This quote from Saint Paul was intended to give courage to believers who find themselves in difficult situations, and was never meant to be interpreted to mean that we all can run the hundred-meter-dash in world record time, or that we can all make it rich. As we renew our minds on a proper foundation we will see things that used to throw us for a loop with new eyes; sort of like water repelled by a duck's feathers. We will handle fears, threats, and broken relationships with wisdom and gentleness.

§ 6.5: SELF-PITY & COMPLAINING:

The diagram (seen below) has its genesis in the Old Testament (OT) where the Jews complained, whined against, and criticized Moses and God, and what the Holy Spirit has been teaching me about this in myself. First off, I now know I can determine what I focus on and think about: both positive and negative. I don't have to be at the mercy of any fallen angel's confusing lies, or anyone else's for that matter.

All the negativity/ fear/ self-pity/ anxiety/ and powerlessness we might feel are inspired by the dark thoughts we think, and believe which are often inserted into our minds by fallen angels and are often hurtful, and scary. We can tune into them, or away from them. All the positive warm and respectful thoughts inserted into our minds are done in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. We can tune into them, or away from them. All our feelings are triggered by the thoughts and beliefs in our heads or from what we focus on. If we rid ourselves from certain negative thoughts, then the feelings we have from them will also go away provided we didn't start to believe one or more of the lies behind them. Enter the fork in the road diagram below.

²² Philippians 4:13



I get to choose where I want to go in my mind: no one else can decide this for me unless I give them that power. I don't have to "own" the malicious codes the devils put into my mind unless I choose to agree with them and live them out. The Gateway to darkness is through "self-pity/ complaining," and the more often we go there the more it will accelerate into Judgmentalism which leads to selfishness until it becomes a "negative-stronghold" of bitterness in our minds and hearts. The Gateway to positivity is saying I don't need to "indulge in self-pity/

complaining,” and this leads to love, and compassion as we choose to love others the way we would want to be loved as far as grace is concerned. The more we give up self-pity/ complaining the easier it will be to be positive and to love, to be warm, and to be kind until it becomes the “default attitude” in our hearts and minds. The struggle to think positively will get easier, but we will always have to choose between: should we indulge in self-pity/ or complaining, or should we give up complaining and self-pity? The choice is ours!

Over time the connections on the left side of the diagram above accelerate into strongholds until they become blurred and we automatically fall into judgmentalism when something negative happens. And we might find ourselves oscillating or vacillating between {a resentful/ self-pitying attitude} and a {Mean demanding/ or War attitude} expecting our supposed rights to be met. The former has the attitude of: “poor me” and the latter is about getting our “revenge”.

People who are judgmental may oscillate or vacillate between the “poor me” and the “revenge” - attitudes and in either case they will only measure out love less than or equal to what other people measure out to them. They are insecure and choose to not love those who don’t love them. They are insecure, motivated by fear of rejection, and have low self-esteem. They don’t know their worth in God’s eyes. They have believed lies that make them more like parasites than lovers. They are motivated by a selfish kind of love (lust). They hunger for power to control people, the present and the future. Therefore, they seek knowledge in these areas either from the occult or in prayer to God. Saving face is their goal. They often view God’s love as conditional, God as hard to please, and God as someone who only loves you if you belong to Him, or if you got your theological ducks in a row. They may believe God only starts to love you once you give Him reign over your life. They also believe they ought only love others once they belong to their sect, cause or particular-denomination and have fulfilled all the initiation requirements and have a decent track record (whatever that means?). The judgmental often feel they aren’t respected when people don’t always do as they please (they take it personally). Their efforts to get respect always fall short because they act from the flesh (weakly or strongly) and people sense this as inauthentic. Judgmental people blame, blame, and blame and are very weak at seeing the bright side of things and being thankful.

Either way, one has got to process the stuff that bothers oneself, instead of complaining. Not complaining means not complaining to God either. So, what gives? It comes down to first confessing and repenting in prayer from our sin, and then using “I”-statements to express to God in a renewed way one’s feelings, hurts, anger, and frustrations instead of attacking, judging, criticizing, sulking, and complaining. This way we aren’t used by Satan to accuse people before God of doing vile and mean things. In speaking and listening to the Holy Spirit we lighten our loads, and He puts ideas, truths, and wisdom into our thoughts as we reason with Him in friendship...that helps us to process our stuff healthily!

The listening part might seem out of this world foolishness. But it will come naturally to followers of Jesus who are willing to learn and grow in their relationship with God. Books by Brad Jersak, and Mark Virkler are good places to start to grow in two-way prayer.

Non-judgmental people are stronger and love lavishly even those who treat them like shit. They are not insecure...they have hope...and believe the best about everyone else. They do not see themselves as being at the capricious or fickle mercy of others...there is no struggle for power in them. They are not motivated by fear. They are not motivated by fear of rejection. They aren't attempting to use God as a good luck charm or as someone with a crystal ball that predicts the future conveniently for them so they can safely navigate tricky economic uncertainty. They trust God with the future and live as much as possible in the present. They view God's love as unconditional (i.e. loving them whether or not they do good, do bad, or have apathy), that He is merciful to both the righteous and the wicked; the knowledgeable and the ignorant; and the wise and the foolish. Non-judgmental people love, love, and love. You can be yourself with them.

Not complaining leads to perspective, realism, non-idealism, patience and faith...and surprisingly trusting people instead of having fears growing out of insecurities because we no longer are looking for things to criticize and find wrong with people. So, where are we looking? We are looking to live out the "golden rule" in the context of "grace."

Not choosing to whine gives us a feel for people so we have an intuition, connectedness, a trust, a fellowship, a roomy relationship that allows for ups and downs and the ability to forge deeper and deeper commitments to each other. Such is living life and that means growth. Grace means that God loves us unconditionally. Not as we deserve and not as some think they have earned. Lavishly. Patiently. Caring. Forever.

When one is intolerant of, or judges harshly another person's conduct as "deeply sinful and unacceptable" (correctly or incorrectly) that one happens to do one self (knowingly or unknowingly), then this is commonly known as hypocrisy. But the Bible says that if we have broken one command we have broken the whole Law. So, hypocrisy is more than having committed the exact same sin as the one we judged to be worse than us, but having committed any sin and still to have judged. Judging any person is always wrong. Telling the truth is different than judging. Our behaviors will not be repented from successfully/ removed/ healed/or cleaned up until we deal with our hypocrisy by repenting in prayer from it successfully and that means us stopping our judging of people. It is so easy to compartmentalize stuff, and when we do so, then we become blind and will hurt a lot of people when given the opportunity to do so.

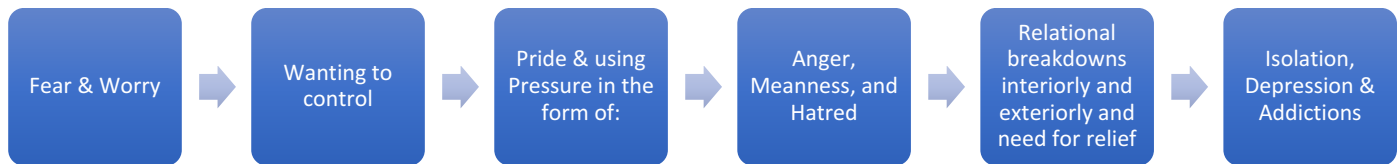
§ 6.6: HEALING: FEAR, WORRY, & PRESSURE:

I have wobbled back and forth from being too easy on myself to being too hard on myself most

of my adult life. The pressure I put on myself caused a lot of stress until it was removed, but it did have health-related-repercussions on my body because of what went on in the mind. One can't get rid of being hard, angry, and mean with oneself by being hard, angry, and mean with oneself.

Being hard on others usually means we are hard on ourselves, but not always. This is a “reap what you sow” kind of justice. If we seek to start loving others like we want to be treated, then we start to grow spiritually and draw positive energy or grace from God, but we need to deal with the old structures and growths of pressure, meanness, and pride within us through prayer.

Being hard on oneself is a result of pride which is a result of fear and worry. When we have fears then we will worry, and worry leads to the need to control which leads to pressure which leads to meanness, anger, and hatred. When we are hard on ourselves (mean to ourselves) we will be hard on others. When we are hard on ourselves we will do so in God's throne room too.



We can be hard on ourselves in one context and not so in another. I have found it important to realize this so they can be dealt with separately, as not being hard on self can mean being hard on others.

I have realized that I ought not try to manufacture gentleness, and heartfelnness when I honestly attempt to confess to God and do business with Him in prayer. I need to be real, honest (not magnifying or minimizing my sins), or more exactly, I need to be truthful and be myself. Being hard on myself is an attitude or disposition that needed to be jettisoned through prayer as I encountered it. And I needed to deal with putting pressure on myself, worrying, and giving into my fears about the future through trust in God's promises. Yes, confession and repentance in prayer are very important, but I needed to deal with my thinking through wisdom and seeing things in new ways.²³

If Jesus is gentle with me, I ought to be gentle with myself and act out of the goodness in my heart. This happens when we renew our my minds/ hearts as per the definition found in chapter four. I continually need to invite the Spirit of Jesus into my darkness, and emptiness; asking Him for healing, to speak into my life, and listening to Him in patience, asking questions that can lead to wisdom, and knowing how to pray so things get processed-healthily and are dealt with.

²³ Cf. My books called *Exploring Faith, Hope, and Love*, and *Exploring Humility and Pride* for new and healthy ways of seeing things

When we have crippling pressure, or black meanness, then we must realize that it did not get that way over night. Looking back and admitting as much of it (along with the pride and worry) to ourselves and God as we can remember is important because we can then see how the habit formed in us over the years and just how much we need to change our wrong thinking, unhealthy commitments, and idol worship. God will in forgiving us cleanse us as we trust Him with it.

I'm powerless to control others: God, family, spouse, friends, coworkers, bosses, people on the street, on the buses, and in line ups, and accepting this powerlessness is key to working on dispensing grace instead. Controlling others is an illusion. We can be so bound to wanting to control people, being impatient with them, and only caring about ourselves.

When we experienced powerlessness in the past unjustly, then it can trigger frustration, powerlessness, anger, and trying to control people in the present. I had this problem, but when I forgave those who violated my personal space in the past, then the struggles for control vanished leaving peace.

There is no rest or peace in seeking our own wills. Praying for God's will to be done is important to breaking this control mentality. There is peace in seeking God's will, and it moves us away from unhealthy expectations, and selfishness. Wanting to control people to save our lives also comes from the energy found in our "sin nature" and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within us.

I determined my wrong thinking by accepting untruths or lies spoken to me. I took responsibility for this, and realized that God is willing to help me change by grace in repentance and guiding me to new thinking through His truth.

Going no deeper than just praying: "Oh God, I so much want to change, poor-me, I hurt so much, I so much want to change. Amen!" will not work because it leaves everything to God. We must search out what is in our hearts with God's Light, help and grace, repent in strategic prayer, and put to death the weak "poor me I can't do it" attitudes (of worry and fear) in our hearts by resting our faith in God's promises, grace, and truths. There are two-actual-addiction-cycles, one involves putting pressure on oneself, the other has to do with fear. I talk about them in my book called *Expanding the Twelve Steps*.

§ 6.7: HEALING COWARDICE:

I heard it said in a Batman movie, "that some people are not afraid to die" along with the question: "But are they afraid to live?" I'm not afraid to die...but deep down inside I just wanted an easy cushy, and wimpy passage to Heaven. I did not want to live, I saw it as exhausting, draining, and I feared and hated the burden. Basically, I was afraid to live. This is cowardice...and it does make us demanding, judgmental, and un loving because we don't want to pay the price

of living life or loving people. This attitude is negative and attracts negativity to us and gives room for demons to work in our lives. When we are not wanting to pay the price, we take shortcuts. Hence, we have sloth, instant gratification, and gluttony too, just to feel good by numbing the negative. Not wanting to pay the price for stuff in our lives leads to not wanting to pay the price to love others.

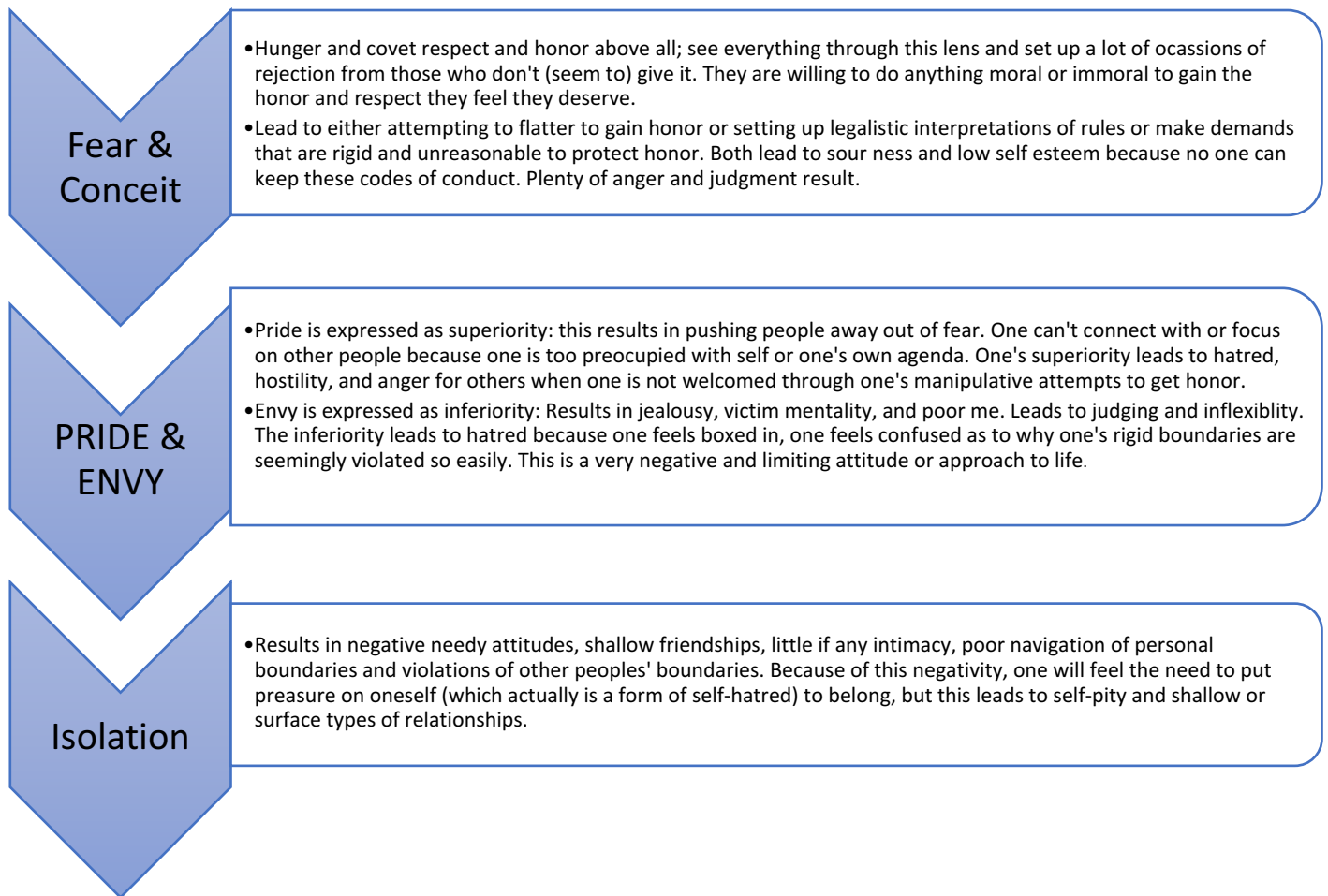
Crippling fear is the nemesis of courage. Fear is a feeling that can become an attitude that causes us to back away weakly from confrontation. If we have negative, poisoned and hurtful speech then confrontation is a “NO!” until we deal with the fear and cowardice, and renew our minds with healthy kind thinking, respectful speech, and relating that lends itself to non-violence as a pathway to peace.

The Bible says that being cowardly is unhealthy. Cowardice is produced by lies and fears of being hurt again, so confessing our cowardice as wrong and unhealthy, giving up our fears, and dealing with the hurt so we can act from a place of courage is what Jesus asks us to do. I found it a good idea to pray about my failed past romances in this context, as well as hurts that happened in all my romances.

§ 6.8: HEALING CONCEIT:

I never knew that I was conceited until I heard what the word “actually” means. Conceited ness is a fear of not being respected or honored and using all means to achieve it or protect it. Being conceited means one is self-focused, selfish or greedy for attention or fearful of not being esteemed or belonging. To seek self-esteem has to do with ego. Conceit is rooted in the lie that we don't have self-worth, and that we aren't who God says we are: loved by Him unconditionally.

God used the definition of conceit to illumine the construct (below) within me so that I could start to repent from it and find more freedom to care, love, and feel empathy for others and so connect with them in more meaningful ways.



Being conceited is a fear based attitude that works together with both pride and envy that lead to isolation and emptiness.

We break the strongholds of conceit (together with addressing selfishness, pride, and fear) in prayer by confessing it and repenting in prayer when it becomes an issue. Giving up the pride of trying to establish one's own supposed: honor/ respect/ and glory is important and replacing it with seeking true honor and true justice. When we choose healthy justice, we have healthy honor; but if we seek honor above justice our moral compasses get screwed up and we get stuck with loads of self-pity and if we are violent we will engage in brutality.

We can have conceit in many different relationships and situations in our lives, so when our conceit tries to (re)assert itself repeatedly, we confess it to God and repent in prayer contextually as needed, and each time renew our minds with Jesus' truths/ commands/ promises/ teachings/ and unconditional love (grace), so we begin to see the world and people differently through the eyes of grace.

To renew the mind, I must remember that my self-honor, self-respect, and self-care are

different than the honor, respect and care others show me. Yes, I'm a sheep...with a herd instinct...but I choose to follow Jesus and no one else, He is the one I look up to. I choose to honor, respect myself, and care for myself because no one else can do that for me (I got to love myself), not even Jesus can take my place as it is something I must do myself with His grace. I choose to believe in myself because I'm loved by God. I can't demand it from others, they can give me respect or say no to it when they want, but my self-esteem is in my own hands and comes from God loving me, and believing in me together with me loving myself, and believing in myself. I choose to not be needy! A conceited person acts like a parasite in relationships and uses people more than loving them back.

There is a relationship between self-pity, conceitedness, and justice that I discovered in my interior life. I encountered it one morning. I realized that I wanted foremost to be respected by another person rather than to speak the truth in love. If I were to confront the person the possibility of unsettling the person and so seemingly robbing myself of the honor, respect and esteem I felt in his eyes, did not look appealing. In not speaking up I was trying to protect my honor but I hated it because I felt an injustice was visited on me that needed to be rectified. I was caught between justice (just plain putting an end to an injustice, but not retributive justice (aka revenge)) and unhealthy honor. It was a dead end if I chose unhealthy honor above the need for justice because then I'd just endlessly experience self-pity because I would see that I was stuck. If I choose justice over unhealthy honor, then the conceitedness is struck a blow. I did this. But if that is all I do then my conceitedness would bother me something fierce. I realized that two further things need to happen for closure. (1) Confessing and repenting of the conceit, selfishness, pride, and fears I had yet not dealt with in this context, in prayer to God; this would also deal a death blow to my self-pity. (2) Then, after I stand up for the desired justice, when the old conceit tries to reassert itself, I need to choose and commit to justice instead of unhealthy honor to cement the victory.

Seeking justice (restorative, or just stopping injustices, and not retributive justice (or revenge)) establishes humility and kills conceit. Growing in gentleness and appreciating the worth of others is key. We do this by choosing to care for others, and to live out the Golden Rule when it comes to receiving and giving grace. Believing others have worth gives us faith that we have worth too. They go together. This also helps to kill our conceitedness, and turns us into servants instead of pursuing selfish ambition. Fighting off self-pity in this context is also important.

Our battles with conceit cannot be defeated when we refused people justice because we were too busy protecting our respectability unless we do process it in prayer as outlined above, and make necessary needed amends. Conceit has crept up in many nooks and crannies in my interior life. It tries to prevent me from forgiving people when my honor is attacked. Acknowledging the conceit in this context and confessing it, repenting of it in prayer, and

renewing my thinking and believing helps me to forgive people much more easily.

7 EXPLAINING & HEALING MY PRIDE

Pride is the next building block in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” after fear. Pride decides it is superior to all and knows better than anyone else on how to approach life/ and navigate fears, especially in the face of traumatic hurtful experiences. So, as it grows so does the tree structure that grows out of it within us. Notice, having pride in our lives does not mean we don’t have some humility elsewhere in our lives. It is not an all or nothing thing: there are different degrees of pride and humility; and we can grow or shrink in either department.

I know that my pride is alive whether or not I’m aware of it. At its maximum, I recognize it as a powerful dark energy stream within that is devoid of love. Confronting it with truth helps keep it in check, and uncovering the lies around it and replacing them with appropriate truth kills it for that episode.

People who try to save themselves by pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and refuse to humbly call on Jesus are acting out of pride. They believe the lie that they aren't dependent on God, and that God does not care for them and won't help them. Pride does not trust anyone and is consumed with fears (hence possibly wearing masks), and with giving oneself all the credit for accomplishments done. Pride thinks we are better than other people (hence the tendency to judge people). When people do hurt us, then we can feel justified in our proud reactions or judgments. We will take wild jumps in reasoning and lose our ability to see reality in ourselves, and in our relationships; we will see people in distorted ways. This needs to be healed.

People with pride may outright reject God, but many people who are found in churches, synagogues, and mosques on holy days seek power too and so have pride, and blindly see God as a way of getting the power they covet. Because pride seeks power to feel in control and to keep fears at bay it finds its way into the lives of fallen humanity, myself included, very easily whether we have religion or not.

To kill the strongholds of pride, I need to uncover the lies I believed in the contexts of the hurts I experienced and the other unreasonable fears I hold onto. I also need to give up the judgments I made out of my pride. To help mortify pride (and for this I am in debt to websites found through the Google search engine) is to give God credit for all that He gives to whomever He gives. That means expressing gratitude to God in prayer and in the heat of the moment. This requires me to see God with the eyes of faith that say He is good, generous and kind to all (and thanking Him despite the situations where I feel it is the opposite) for this is freeing. This is not enough, I should confront the pockets of pride (I feel) that say I am superior and more significant than others, with potent and sober truth (inviting Jesus into each space) along with correct thinking

that puts things into perspective. This requires that I see my pride as foolishness, and ridiculous. This is one of many things I can do to help renew my mind.

Confessing my foolishness for believing the lies I hold onto, and confessing the wrongness, and history of my proud attitudes is where I started. Then to repent in prayer from my proud attitudes, my judgments, and the wrongs and hurts that come from my judging people.

Being open, to learning new things is key to practicing humility (instead of being closed minded) and that means listening to others. Being open is not enough, I need to be teachable by God, so I pray for humility. To further de-throne pride I put to death my unreasonable fear by putting my faith in a merciful caring, graceful, and compassionate Jesus. Fear motivates trying to control people, things, and situations usually all by myself and that leads to living out of pride which says I know better than anyone else.

Confessing this to God brings forgiveness, relief, peace, and a sense of starting over. It removes the guilt. Confession together with repentance in prayer, renewing the mind, submitting to God, and living out the Golden Rule in the context of “grace” helps deal with my past proud habits, proud thinking, proud attitudes, proud judging, and proud actions. Seeking to do God’s will means I don’t see myself in control and this is very healthy and humble. In spending time with God when I’m teachable will slowly help to break my pride, and move from negativity to positivity in my journey.

§ 7.2: TRUTH TOOLS TO OVERCOMING PRIDE

From the Website:

<http://www.fabsharford.com>

we get the six tips below in “bold text” that help to Kill the stronghold of pride (the Website is a must read) the content in parenthesis below is either commentary from myself or from other sources:

- 1) **Consider the ridiculousness of pride** (Pope Francis said: When you believe that you are better than others: remember your worst sins and know that you wouldn’t wish others to see or know about them).
- 2) **View each day as an opportunity to forget yourself and serve others** (Consider others as more significant than yourself). This begins at home, commuting back and forth from work, and at work, as well as in social circles. It starts by rejecting a lazy superiority and to grow in seeing the value of people other than oneself. See point (15) below for more).
- 3) **Seek a deeper knowledge of God** (This is done by pursuing intimacy with God...this requires becoming dependent on God and aiming to be open with God...not becoming “only” sin focused all the time (this keeps one’s focus away from God which is not wise). Also, meditate on the

cross of Jesus and His solidarity with us in the Gospels. This takes away the pressures, and comparisons that lead to pride. Read helpful books on prayer, humility, and love that inspire us to follow God and grow in humility, tolerance and love).

4) **Read the biographies of great saints** (Also, listening to what others say, think, believe, and do with not wanting to judge them helps us learn from them. This is helpful in nurturing humility that leads to love. Be careful to not only seek head knowledge (see point (2) above). Everyone is a vehicle of meaning from one degree to another so don't discount anyone's opinion based on religion, color, age, or culture... Loyalty can either be a downfall or it can help...whatever leads to love is humility based).

5) **Remember daily the danger of pride** (Just because we find ourselves struggling with pride seemingly because we have incorporated a new belief into our paradigm does not mean that the belief should be rejected. Often there are other beliefs, ideas and understandings that need to be incorporated into our lives that will help stabilize us and help to humble us and fight off the pride. We are complex creatures and we need to realize that much is hidden from us...so patience is required when we come to reject or accept stuff. Remember that unhealthy independence when it comes to how we are going to live our lives is not wise. So, pursue wisdom and realize that real wisdom is practiced and is not a cursory familiarity with certain notions/ ethics/ concepts/ or morality).

6) **Pray for help to practice humility** (Why pray for it? Is it because you want to be holy? What is holiness anyways? Holiness is spiritual healthiness, not superficiality, a projected image, or merely a reputation that has no trusted foundations).

These next sixteen-tips below I came across in my journey; the first four were given to me by the Holy Spirit and have been very helpful in Killing my stronghold of pride; tip 11) below was given to me by my wife Sophie (and has the power to get us to live in the moment because pride/ negativity all too often focuses on what is not; whereas humility focuses on what is):

7) **Change my attitude from, "Impress me" to, "I care for you"**. This is done by confessing in the moment the wrongness of this attitude of, "Impress me" to God and deliberately replacing it with, "I care for you" in each context. I have often said to myself in my head: "I don't care" about this or that thing...and I then realized that there can at times be an unwholesome judgment behind it when I invoke it, meaning pride and fear along with trust issues between me and my God needing to be dealt with.

8) **In Prayer confess the exact nature and history of my Pride-Based-Attitudes, owning them as my own telling God I'm sorry and asking Him to forgive me while I'm still connected to the attitudes I want gone: attitudes such as scoffing, ridiculing, and thinking-the-worst-of-others, because these go against humility and love; then to repent in prayer from them, and replace the**

negativity with thanksgiving.

An anally proud attitude can say:

Impress me; scoff, scoff, scoff...You aren't putting out...I'm better than what you have to offer...I'd rather indulge in my negative, poor-me-unhappiness because you disappoint me and don't give me the attention I need or want; or, won't entertain me! I have seen better, you have nothing that would make me happy...because it takes a lot to impress me and you aren't coming through because you are not creative enough, sacrificial enough...good-looking enough...rich enough...funny enough...kind enough... and special enough...etc.

I need to start where I'm at. Praying prayers like those suggested in this book won't work if I'm not connecting to the emotions/ attitudes of scoffing, ridiculing, and thinking-the-worst-of-others I have entertained. I need to pray and ask in faith until these dark vices are broken and are replaced by healthy truths. The best way to do so is to stand on God's promises, be conscious and connected to my heart (emotions/ desires/ commitments/ beliefs) and seek God with all my heart/ mind asking for the ability to love people more deeply, and to not give up searching for what I ask for. Killing the dark stream of pride within completely can be done together with prayer and the right truths. Truth sets one free to love and not judge.

9) **Practice genuine thanksgiving for the good and the bad: the good because it is good; and the bad because God can and often does use it for good eventually.** Committing in prayer that God is "absolutely" good, praising Him for His goodness, resting in His love, and focusing on Him and not on how holy, pious, and wise I am (in worship or in my theology, or actions). Worshipping God kills our pride. Worshipping God regularly with Him being the focus is healthy. God does not need our worship; but He ought to be the focus of my worship and praise because that puts the credit for good things in the right place.

Coming into God's presence with thanksgiving, from the holy ground set aside in my heart is the only way to gain access to God's presence in friendship. I can't cast out Satan with Satan. I can't cast out darkness with darkness. I can't cast out meanness with meanness. I can't cast out hostility with hostility. But when I come with clean energy, open to being taught, God will grant His grace because my energy is a hunger and thirst for righteousness with tears.

10) **Put my trust in Jesus to save me from my sin, and to help me love supernaturally in my own unique way.** Submitting to God also means putting up with stuff that God allows into our lives that is negative without complaining/ criticizing/ or judging; i.e.) tolerate the uncomfortable and agree to live with the consequences of other people's hurtfulness towards me; i.e.) forgive from the heart. Submitting to God also means submitting to His teaching and leadership. The most authoritative teaching is found in the New Testament. Then go and do the good works God has

prepared in advance for me to do.

11) **“Focus on the opportunity in the difficulty; not on the difficulty of the opportunity”**. Got this line from the wife that when applied in the presence of self-pity (which usually means the structure: fear> pride> envy> complaining >... is operating within) helps to kill the self-pity: It is a fitting way to kill self-pity, negativity, complaining, blaming, ugly anger, and calls of unfairness. It helps to kill sloth, envy, and judging) and creates a great work ethic, and aids the creative process.

This is a principle that when practiced allows one to live in the moment. Problems and difficulties require processes to diagnose and solve, and when there are no immediate solutions then powerlessness, depression, and self-pity can result and this can fuel my negativity, anger and direct my attention away from what I can do. When engaged in a project, I can focus on what is still not done or I can focus on what I am doing and has been done. The latter gets me into the moment and makes me feel good, the former will weigh on me so long as the tasks are not done and can steal my motivation and make me feel a lot of self-pity along with the temptation to give into sloth and so quit.

12) **Start seeing people as “special” in a true and healthy way**. A fleshly dark insensitive-energy that I had, had these thoughts behind it.

Some people “really” think they are, “so damned” special. You just can’t trust them. They are so predictable. They will do anything to pull one over on you. They only care for themselves. I see through them. They think they are oh so special. They think they own the world. I’m better than them.

These words come from someone who has been hurt badly, turned scoffer, is skeptical, is sour, is jaded, and has no hope in people. These words drip with self-pity, pride, envy, hurt, and an, “I will show them I’m better and more special” -attitude. People who have been hurt badly can lash out in this way: The hurting land up hurting others. But this does not have to be permanent. Obviously there needs to be forgiveness directed towards one’s enemies that will bring healing. After this, renewing one’s mind using “I”-statements instead of judging the people as expressed in the rant above helps restore one to sanity. This gets one in touch with one’s nobler attitudes, healthier energy and feelings God has put in our hearts.

I can see just how irrational the thoughts are behind some of my attitudes or feelings. When one feels a fleshly insensitivity within oneself, countering the lie of: “I’m better than them” behind that dark energy with, “I’m not healthier than them; and we are what we are” is the medicine that helps to kill this rise of pride within. These truths need to be taken to war on the dark energy of pride. Shallowness won’t achieve anything. We need to go deeper and deeper to get to the foundation of the tree structure within. We have power to choose our thoughts,

thinking, words, tone of voice used, and the energy of the words, so that they can be healing and restorative in our relating style instead of toxic.

If I don't see people as special in healthy ways, I will have a place within where I am arrogant, and it will peep out every now and then trying to flaunt my supposed superiority or "specialness" in other people's faces (been there and done that). Each person bears the image of God stamped on their souls. I need to respect the whole person. People respond to kindness more warmly than anger. When I have prayed through my strongholds of arrogance (however much I have it), then countering my pride with the truth that: "all of us are special in our own unique ways", together with declaring/ praying out loud that my personal walls/ boundaries of superiority are dismantled and lowered through trust in Jesus, forgiving my enemies, caring and loving them; and declaring all real estate in my heart to belong to God, and no longer to the devil, has let more good stuff in, but also helped me to love outwardly in newer more intimate ways which means I am more victorious against pride through Jesus' care, grace, truth and mercy.

Many times, going deeper and praying deeper about a sinful stronghold is needed. Here are two such ways:

- I. Praying the scriptures. Here is an example of my own: after Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount (that was all about humility in action), and goes His way with many following Him. A Leper comes up to Him and tells Jesus that if Jesus is willing He can heal him. Jesus does. To pray this, I have visualized myself as the Leper (but with a certain attitude of pride in my life being my skin disease) with me kneeling before Jesus, and asking Him to heal me. And He did.
- II. Going back to our painful memories and looking for where Jesus is in those hurtful scenes and asking Him to speak healing into the painful memory (there are many healthy books on this topic) can bring health too. He might speak a word to us that opens up an overlooked area of sin that we need to deal with in prayer that can possibly resolve our painful memory so it no longer triggers sinful responses in our relationships.

13) **Use my higher right to sacrifice my lower rights.** Pride says I got to have the best, be the best, or have what others have. Pride often means an attitude of self-entitlement. With such attitudes anger is not far away when what we have is threatened or violated, ridiculed, stolen or disrespected. The way to conquer this area is, "to yield our personal rights and possessions to God and allow Him to return them back to us as privileges"²⁴ in His time. Everything we have is a gift from God. Even if we fought to keep the devil from stealing it, we don't own it, we can't demand it from God even if it is a "right" or a "normal" part of everyday human existence. Self-

²⁴ Bill Gather

made people think everyone including God owes them what they hold dear.

But, people who respect God (of which I am one) also have pride, and so can and do have varying degrees of entitlement, dearly held onto rights, and things we hold onto that we feel very strongly about and protect them sometimes in very mean ways. When our rights are violated we will get angry unless we have given those rights to God. Jesus did not count equality with God as something to be grasped or exploited. He humbled Himself in total respect for who He was, and did it out of His humility, His love, and His care for humanity. We are called to imitate Him.

But I can't do this through my own strength, my own wisdom, and my self-righteousness. If I do, then I become, "spiritless, characterless, and a religious-robot."²⁵ I need to approach this task through humble prayer, taking Jesus as my model and using Scripture as my encouragement and support. If I have self-pity, anger, feelings of injustice, and calls of unfairness in giving up my rights, or entitlements then I'm not doing it with Jesus' help. Joy, freedom, kindness, patience, and peace should be the outcome when I give up my rights or entitlements in healthy ways in prayer.

When I have difficulty in forgiving a coworker for not respecting me, or for not obeying a rule that in my eyes symbolizes respect for me when kept, or whose actions make me go farther than my self-honor seeks to permit, then the anger can only be eliminated when I give up my pomp, my surge to protect my honor, and give up "my" right to the "respect I covet or desire from others", through Jesus' presence, example, power, joy, humor, and wisdom through heartfelt prayer.

In prayer, I have found confessing my supposed entitlements, repenting in faith from holding onto them so rudely, declaring Jesus as Lord and Savior (all in those areas of my life where I cling onto my rights, as a jerk would, along with recounting the history of doing it in meanness and self-pity) as the best way to clear this stronghold in my relational life. It is so easy to think that people owe me, to view them as useful only so long as they serve a purpose in my life. Humility loves people not because of all their power, intellect, and creativity, but because they have worth, dignity, and a destiny. An Example:

I have strongly felt entitled to quietness about me so that I could determine my own thoughts and not let others determine my trains of thought, or be pestered with annoying sounds. When I did not get the quiet I wanted, I'd go to a nasty and self-pitying place inside of me and when pushed to it I'd act like a jerk. Now I pray about it to God, admitting my dogmatic commitment to being nasty and mean inside when my sense of entitlement is threatened. I receive forgiveness, and repent in prayer as thoroughly as

²⁵ Mark Virkler, *Counseled by God*, p. 96

possible. And with God's presence, peace, and grace give up my entitlement, and ask Him for the ability to practice tolerance, kindness, and to care for others. This approach is not done through becoming a whipped-boy, or defacing my personhood, but through the example, grace and presence of Jesus Christ.

14) **Practice forgiveness and process my emotions in healthy ways.** Not forgiving punishes me not those who hurt me. Also, I need to deal with my anger, confusion, and broken expectations when they show up by owning my feelings in prayer to God, and then to renew my mind with His responses and with the help of “I”-statements that move me from judging people to telling the truth. Knowing that God feels my struggles, and just getting in touch with my feelings goes a long way to healthily processing them. Not processing all this, limits or kills my ability to practice the “golden rule.” In processing my feelings, I get in touch with how God wired me which is to be noble, kind, pure, healthy, and at peace. The flesh can't compete with the Spirit; I am made for the Spirit.

15) **Practice humility; not just Killing the stronghold of pride:** Yes, there is a place for Killing the stronghold of pride, but something must take its place. There is death, but it is not completed without resurrection. Jesus is the Resurrection. Committing to viewing myself the way God sees me is a part of humility. This isn't supposed to be a static state, but a dynamic way and a work in progress.

Let's not settle for Law, having to have things personally fair all the time, demanding our rights meanly, having to be first all the time, and only being concerned about getting to heaven.

“Anyone who seeks to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life will gain it”. Jesus' commands are high enough to steer us in the right direction, and He comes into us to not only help us fulfill the OT Law through keeping the higher LAW of love He taught in the Sermon on the Mount so that we care for our neighbors in tangible ways. When we grow in the fruit of the Spirit then we know that we are growing in humility.

The strategy to confront negative strongholds is to admit they are in my life, but to say to them: “I don't need you right now, and I give you up with Jesus' help through faith because God provides for my needs with His grace and peace”. Grace is the Holy Spirit's empowering presence. All my sins are done because I come to falsely believe that they will fulfill my wants and needs. Admitting this in each context, and mourning the losses incurred by the sins because they “really” promise emptiness, and committing to and connecting with Jesus as Prince of Peace is key to moving on to healthier pastures. I need to do this emotionally as well as intellectually. In this way, I count dead previous strongholds of sin, and embrace the full life promised by Jesus, as I turn to the Holy Spirit to overcome my sin. Nature hates vacuums so I should replace my sin energy with virtues-energy (i.e. grace). Grace comes from the peace and the presence of God.

Note, the process of repenting prayer asks me to deal with the lies that I believed in the moments I was seduced to become slaves of certain sins that became strongholds in my life. These lies are the reasons why certain idols were used to try to satisfy my needs.

For instance, if I was hurt by being rejected, I can be deceived into believing the lie that being conceited will protect my self-image and give me the sense that I am still likable. Or, I might believe the lie that I need to project a strong and arrogant attitude to others so they won't think I am hurt and weak inside. Both these strategies help to destroy the image of God I was made in. They destroy healthy identity, and rob me of being fully loved and reciprocating love.

Overnight success won't necessarily happen...but a gradual process of renewal will be formed as new patterns of thinking, talking, and acting are slowly formed. The “thou shall not’s” or the “no, no...no’s” by themselves in the face of fleshly energy are not sufficient for positive victory and healthy change...they leave us stuck and defeated...we need negative-attitude-habits replaced with positive-attitude-actions. Jesus offers this to all of us through His presence, His teaching, His Commands, and His guiding strength all correctly focused.

16) **Humility grows when I aim for love.** Humility does not grow when my foremost aim is to acquire truth, because then all I am looking for is informative-insights that may broaden knowledge (which can lead to pride) and I won't get beyond it to connecting with people which is what love is all about. When I am “people” focused, then in caring for them I will find ways to grow in love which means growing in humility too.

17) **Focus on whatever is true, positive, uplifting, kind, clean, and gentle.** The ability to love is sustained by focusing on Jesus and nurturing clean and pure energy within to love people. Once I have confessed my sins, I focus on Jesus and doing His will. “Whatever I focus on will grow inside of me. What grows inside of me I become.”²⁶ Now, Jesus is Lord, and so has authority, but He is gentle, kind, and honest; and does not meanly and angrily lead me to obedience. So, I too should not meanly, dryly, angrily, and unkindly expect obedience from myself and others. It is God's kindness that leads me to repentance.

18) **Become able to accept people's choices when they say “No!”**. This opens doors of love in my heart, makes me generous, kind, and compassionate instead of stuck, mean, judgmental, and angry all the time.

19) **When I get healthier within in an area I ought not compare myself to others.** Because then I undo the blessings coming from God. We counter this pride by giving up the attitude/ judgment of “me=(good, intelligent, better) vs. them=(bad, stupid, worse)” and realize that the line between good and evil goes through my heart, not in between people, groups, cultures, and

²⁶ Mark Virkler

traditions. I needed to give up this belief/ attitude wherever it was hidden within my heart/ mind regarding my relationships (even my close relationships).

20) **When I get proud of the little humility I do have, then healing comes when I confess it to God, repent from it in prayer, renew my mind, submit to God, and accept my cross.**

21) **When I start to spout off about how I achieved, earned, gained insights, or created stuff through my own pain, choices, work, studies, or intellect, then I need to humble myself and admit to God's part in the creative process.**

22) **Embrace God's truth, grace, and presence found in Jesus. Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you.**

§ 7.3: EXPLAINING AND HEALING PRESSURE & FORCE:

Humility is gentle, whereas pride uses pressure (which is usually inwardly focused on self and manipulatively on others) and force (which is usually directed outwards at others). Pressure hardens our hearts and violates other people's boundaries, it is often angry, abusive, cold, hateful, mean, sinister, and strives using a whip to get its stinging way usually with the aim of some misguided perfectionism. When pride uses force, it does so because it treats people as objects or tools to be dropped or picked up when needed. There is little peace in the hearts of those who put pressure on themselves through pride. There is little community for those who hold fearlessly and insensitively to using force to get their way. People with these characteristics will treat animals and people the same way: poorly. Using force is usually very ugly (no shame intended; just a warning).

The only way to kill using pressure and force on people is to confess these sins to God, repent in prayer; and then to deal with them in the context of my pride and fears and hurts; and to explore how to see people and animals more healthily which means truths need to uproot the relational lies I have believed. People with this dynamic operating in their lives, need to learn to see the humanity in others, along within themselves. They have believed lies about themselves usually in the contexts of rejections, or having been hurt by others. Healing of memories through prayer can "really" help in such situations.

When grace flows through me it is the surest way to help me stop applying pressure, force, and manipulation on others and myself through using anger, self-pity, and guilt.

§ 7.4: EXPLAINING AND HEALING ARROGANCE:

Arrogance is defined as an offensive display of superiority or self-importance. It can be a smile on the face when tears are appropriate. It is the most hurtful and hostile kind of pride. When we think, we are better than others (i.e. more special, or superior) we will be tempted to go out of our way to rub our supposed superiority into the faces of those people we despise. Arrogance

goes out of its way to hurt people. Arrogance is devoid of love because it seeks to hurt people. Usually a hurt person will land up hurting others. Usually the arrogant are hurting people...or wounded and numbed from the pain within.

Arrogance is an attitude that says I don't care about other people! It says my interests are most important and searches and applies itself to getting what it wants, but when something blocks the way or when people block the completion of a goal from an arrogant person, he or she will have either meanness or self-pity or both. The meanness will be directed at people, whereas self-pity can be a sign of defeat and anger turned inwards. Arrogance says I only care about myself and my goals are more important than others.

Arrogance means we are hungry for grace, but have not found grace in the area of our arrogance because of unbelief, lies, hurt, or resentments.

So how do I personally get in touch with "caring" for others, and how do I nurture or cultivate it? I know everyone is born with a caring spirit. This is so because we are all endowed with the natural loves at our conception when God knits us together in our mothers' wombs. These caring attitudes can grow or diminish, be stolen from us, or redirected towards things instead of towards people. But caring is ultimately from God, and we can ask Him to make it grow, to heal it, and make it healthy again. Caring for healthy things is noble in God's eyes. Arrogance, because it does not care chooses its own self-centered values, and that means it can be industrious or slothful. If industrious, then it cares about rules, quotas and quality more than people. If it is slothful, it will not care about doing work, or doing anything useful. Arrogance goes against grace, love, and caring for people. The following Prayer helped me to start killing my "arrogance", and was the first step of many needed to replace it with "healthily caring" for people:

Lord Jesus, I confess that over the years I have let the devil rob from me my ability to healthily care, and I have also handled poorly, wasted, ignored, and defiled the deposit of "caring" you put into my heart at conception. I am so sorry for not having cared for the things you care about. I receive your forgiveness, and healing, starting now...and in faith I give up my arrogance which I acted out by using angry pressure on the following persons: "_____" including myself, and believing the lies: "_____" from the devil that helped cement the darkness and emptiness in my heart and mind. I choose now to give up my use of anger to get what I want. **"Angry pressure I accept you, but I don't need you right now"**, and then pray **"Jesus I give this up with your help through faith. Jesus your gentleness, meekness and grace are sufficient"**. I submit to your will Jesus, and I rest in your love as I choose to live out the Golden Rule in the context of grace in this area...I pray this in Jesus' name. Thank you, Lord God, and amen!

The portion of this prayer in bold typeface may need to be spoken (and prayed) regularly to the “sin nature” (and God) as we come against more angry pressure (and very possibly self-pity) in the different contexts of our lives. Those people who use anger (and self-pity) to get their way often lack compassion and don’t care deeply for other people. People can be arrogant and at the same time embrace “self-pity” to get their way because they will use anything to get their way in disrespectful ways.

The way out of me not caring comes from replacing lies with truth that liberates me. It has been said that if I look for truth to love I won't necessarily land up loving because concepts, ideas, and principles eventually may become more important as time goes by than love. Also, if I seek power to love, I won't necessarily love either. I may always be waiting for more power to love, and when I’m weak I may not love because I complain that I don't have enough power to love. Focusing on love out of caring leads to the ability to love. Love is the way; not concepts, and not power; but love. Love grows in weakness, not strength. Putting concepts or power first distracts me from love. Truth is important only as far as aiding me in love. The ability or grace to love comes from God whether I am weak or strong.

Ministry is not about holding onto power, position, and pedigree so I can somehow love and speak truth authoritatively. I must focus on love: "doing to others what I would want done to me" in the context of grace. Then in this way I will live out my destiny and overcome the obstacles (lies) in the way of love.

As a Christian, I trust in Jesus to save me from my sins and to help me to love meaningfully. To renew my mind, I need to jettison the judgmental boxes I put people into, and see people as special in the kindest ways possible. Satan sows the lie in my mind that others are proud, saying, “they think they are something special when they are not, I’m the humble one; not them”; and when I believe this I land up judging and being more proud and arrogant than those I judged. The reason this lie is so powerful is that it is done in the context of being hurt by others. In the past when I was hurt by others I landed up having a jaded view of people and started having a crisis of identity. Which is fertile ground for fallen angels to do their mischief and grow arrogance and hardness of heart in a person’s life.

Once I thoroughly prayed through these issues, then I willingly began to seek to lower my walls and un-commit to arrogance, and re-commit to love and intimacy. This allows more wholesome stuff in, and allows more wholesome stuff out. I became more conscientious when it comes to the stuff that wants to get out of me. “The tree of knowledge of good and evil” is intact, alive, and at work in whomever it has taken root in. The mind might be stagnant, but the dark energy streams of pride in the tree are active whether I’m aware of them or not.

8 EXPLAINING & HEALING THE LUST BRANCHES OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN ME

Lust is one of two-building blocks that spring from pride; the other being coveting. The building block of lust is found on the left side of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil”. It looks like love but is not based on truth or honesty and healthiness.

Lust often gets initiated when people out of self-pity jettison their relationship with God because of some grievance, and decide to live life on their own terms seeking to make themselves happy through their own means or initiative.

Lust loves to use people and things to optimize pleasure; likes to discard them when not needed. Lust kills love. Lust cares only for itself. During the day, if I try to push people with needs and requests out of my way, then I am giving in to lust. I should not try to force things over to my liking exteriorly just like it is unhealthy to do it interiorly through pressure. I can try to fit people into my life or I can die to self-importance and selfish pleasure seeking, let lust die, and care for people more. Lust seeks to “feel good” and “gratified” at the expense of people and will use people for pleasure alone.

When I get restless, impatient, angry, and self-pitying then my lust comes to life. I won't be a Good Samaritan when I am led by lust. Ouch! Finding out where I am at and confessing these things when applicable to God, repenting in prayer, submitting to God out of the renewing of my mind will help to kill this aspect of lust. But then I must also pray through and process my related pride, fear, and how they relate to my broken relationship with God and broken relationships with people I have or had conflict with in order to find healing. Then, I can focus on living in the moment instead of demanding that everything be made over to suit me. Lust promises me happiness, but never consoles me. Lust is a nightmare in the making.

Lust also desires to “feel good” and “gratified” at the expense of health; and this is its primary focus. These things lead to sloth and gluttony which are cured through the grace that comes through prayer and changing what I value. The more I remove my own idols from my God-shaped vacuum within in prayer (inviting Jesus to take His rightful places in my heart) and renewing my mind with healthy truth and thinking (ridding oneself of angry pressure and self-pity as a means to getting one's way), then the more it will make practicing self-discipline and self-control realistic (One will know perhaps for the first time that it is do-able with God's empowering presence). Putting angry pressure on myself kills self-control. And fear creates impatience.

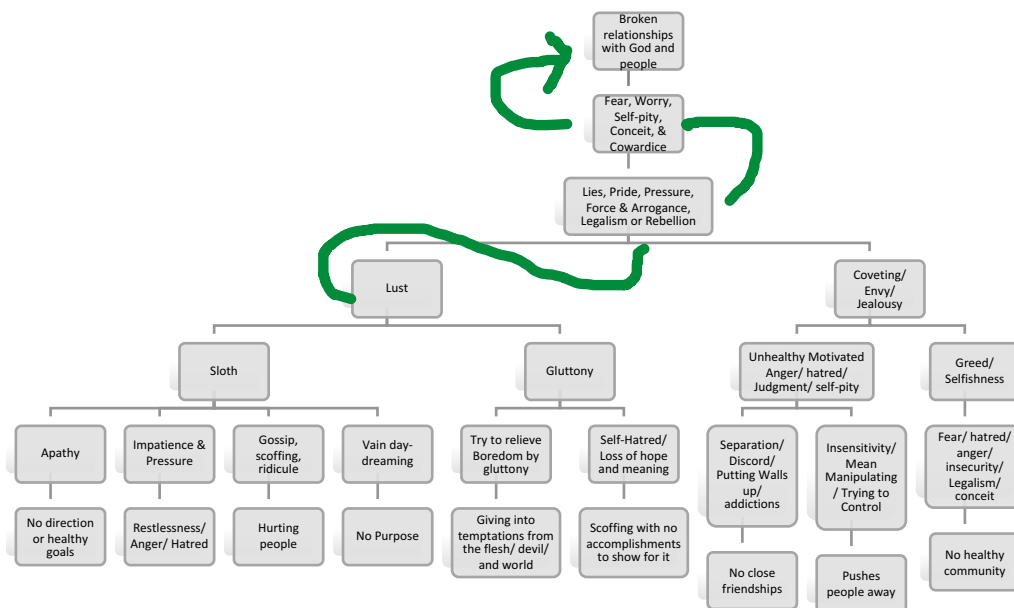
As for the thinking-part I need to decide not to go after stuff only because it tastes or feels good or because it is easier to take the lazy way. If certain feelings lead to healthiness: good, if not,

then one puts to death those feelings by changing how one thinks and believes in prayer. One needs to commit to living for a higher purpose than pleasure alone to heal lust. So how does one get started?

In feeling our lusts, we will get to explore and know the thinking and rationale behind them. This will then help us to counter the “stinking” thinking and believing by exploring healthy (holy) and more believable thoughts whose inspiration is the Holy Spirit and working the strategy of choosing health over feeling instant gratification alone. I need to consciously put my faith in Jesus to save me from my sins regularly. Then I submit to God; and resist the devil. Death without resurrection is incomplete... killing the stronghold of lust is empty without focusing on love and accepting God’s will in the uncomfortable situations in my life.

Example: Tackling Lust in My Life:

The following was an attitude in me where God took the initiative to bring me healing. It was a difficult challenge where I felt things to be so intolerable, unfair, and found myself needing encouragement from many sources as the stink, corruption, and wickedness of my lust was laid bare.



The situation:

I had a huge problem with lust in my life. It looked like this: I had a dark energy within where I compulsively fit people, events, and circumstances mechanically into my schedule mostly caring that they served my wants and needs (it is horrible I know). I basically used both people and situations to serve my own selfish desires. Because of this I was a toy of the devil whenever this

dynamic operated within me, but I did struggle to be free of it. The energy within me was petty, anal, legalistic, and caring only for my own desires and pleasures, and I did not think about praying about it like I do below until God put His finger on it.

Prayer:

Lord God, I give up this dynamic of lust (the convenient parasitical behavior of only caring for others to the degree that they served my interests) in my life with your help through faith. I have a long history of doing this, especially as my schizophrenia progressed and happy moments were hard to come by. I give up my demands with your help Lord Jesus that others fit into my schedule. I give up my impatience, restlessness/ self-pity/ anger/ hatred, and uncaring attitudes towards the people in my life with your help Lord Jesus. I admit I wanted all this because I had an inflated sense of my self worth (i.e. I have pride), and felt my happiness to be more important than others; and I give this up with your help Lord Jesus Christ. I confess all this sin to you the Living God, and receive your forgiveness and healing both intellectually and emotionally...thank you Lord Jesus!

Going Deeper in Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I confess my lust to being committed to using people, and believing the lie that people have no real immediate worth. Please forgive me this horribleness. Lord, I give up saying "No" to being committed to using people; instead I give up with your help using people for my own selfish ends! Thank you! The truth is people have infinite worth in Your eyes, and I choose to agree with you the living God in this matter.

Lord, I confess my pride: thinking I alone have worth. Through your grace I give up saying "No" to the lie that I alone have worth, and instead I give up this belief with your help Jesus.

I confess my fears of losing out, of being forgotten, of not being happy, of going home empty handed, and of missing out on things other people take for granted. Lord Jesus, I give up these fears, and instead I give up these expectations and beliefs and put my trust in you the great Shepherd who cares for me, and loves me! Thanks for promising to do just that!

Lord Jesus, I confess my history of not trusting people, my parents, and loved ones. I confess not trusting you the Almighty God more fully. I give up my sourness, and my despair, and need to control things through anger and self-pity all the time. Thank you so much for loving me and forgiving me these things Jesus! Thank you for coming along side me and imparting your peace, grace, and presence so I know I'm not alone and can face my challenges head on. Amen!

Fruits:

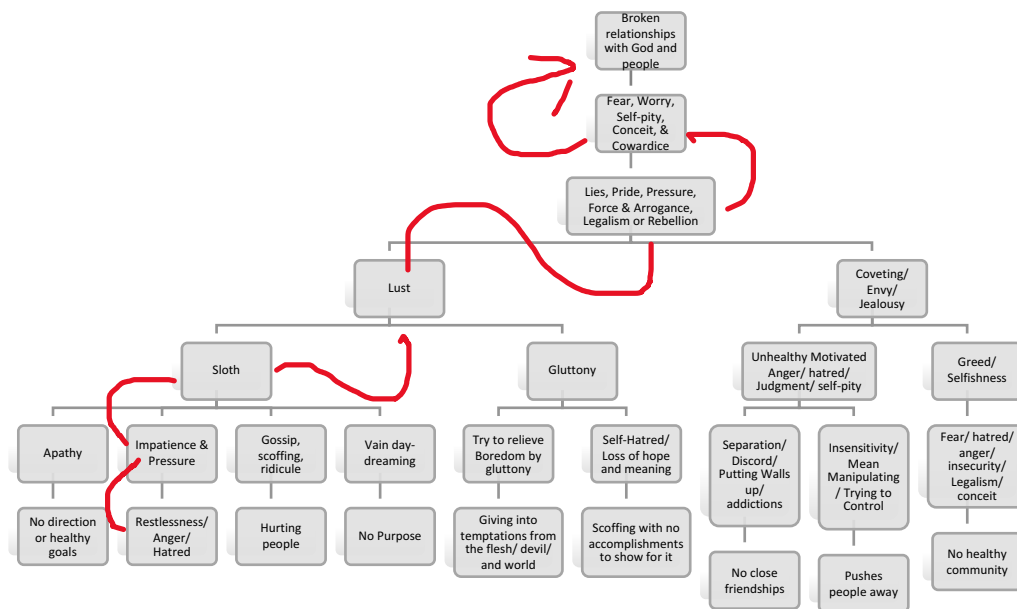
The desperate dark mechanical type of energy is gone. Temporarily, the heightened impatience, and restlessness/ anger/ hatred were gone, but I would have to go deeper to be rid of my

impatience. I did start connecting with people more, being touched by them more, and finding them interesting instead of just wanting to use them.

The lust in this situation also caused gluttony, and a measure of self-control was returned to me.

Going Even Deeper

Later, God put His finger on my impatience. I realized that I struggled with anger when I was impatient and then God showed me that I also had hatred in my heart because I saw others as inconvenient and I hated it. I was then lead in prayer to give up my anger and hatred in the many different contexts where my impatience arose.



When the strongholds of lust described in this section do not completely go away after fighting it in this manner, then we have to go deeper, and have to think about healing our spirits through forgiving the agents of our past hurts and forgiving ourselves in related contexts, giving up judgments towards God, and refraining from attacking God, as well as recommitting to receive from God His grace and to give grace to the people in our lives. Moreover, there is the work of renewing our minds with Jesus' help in prayer that needs to be accomplished. Like giving up the way we wrongly view people, and giving up using anger and self-pity to get our way. When this is all accomplished, then there is real freedom in this area.

I need to remind myself that doing things that require effort will not always become easy and that I can't coast by through life doing God's will. Going by my feelings (to feel good) in the contexts of overcoming gluttony and sloth is never a good idea and makes living life fully, practicing self-control, and doing acts of love, and caring about working, almost impossible. If I do abandon effort, initiative, and caring then I will become useless, and self-control will never

be a reality. Coasting and abandoning effort nullifies grace, truth, and the prayers and strategies found in this book. Coasting and abandoning effort means we are living according to the “flesh” or the “sin nature” and they waste or block the supply of Jesus’ grace.

Having successfully found freedom from this particular stronghold, it must be said that temptations to lust are normal because the “sin nature” does not go away in this life. What we can expect is to not exaggerate grievances and distort things in conflicts, instead we deal with setbacks proportionately.

§ 8.2: EXPLAINING & HEALING SLOTH:

Having said this, my stronghold of sloth grows out of my lust in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within with my help. Sloth only cares about itself and can’t love. It has no depth, purpose, and no meaning. People who have this sickness of sloth usually put angry pressure on themselves to achieve things out of guilt. They don’t want to go the extra mile. And get angry when asked to change plans or do extra stuff. We need to see this as wrong and ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of self-discipline. We start by reasoning with the Holy Spirit to find our bearings, then when led to confess (and feel the motivations and energies of) our slothfulness to God (sloth provides counterfeit peace), owning our history of it, saying it is wrong and that we are sorry, and asking for and receiving forgiveness with thanksgiving from God (not just intellectually but emotionally); and then repenting in prayer from sloth. We do this to deal with our history of sloth. Then we pray about it as it relates to our lust, pride, fear, and broken relationships.

When my sloth tries to reassert itself again and again I need to confess, and repent in prayer again and again from using angry pressure to motivate my efforts at industry. I will have to address this in the different contexts where it is alive in my heart. But I also need to start thinking about healthier motivations and focuses to replace the void of apathy.

As I do this I become open to the Holy Spirit’s gift of self-discipline and His healthy teaching meant to bring about healthy thinking, believing and action. Next, I need to submit to God in this area, and resist the devil. Death without resurrection is not complete. The restorative medicine is to seek meaning in love. Love is active and based on truth...and most of the time I can look to my family and place of work to find outlets of meaningful giving.

I never really thought of myself as a servant and did not have the attitude and healthy disposition of a servant whose heart is wholly devoted to God...but reflecting on how entitlement operates in my life it has brought this more into focus for me. So much written in the Sermon on the Mount is only possible for me when I give up my strangle hold on: personal fairness, grasping my rights, and instead follow the example of the Lord Jesus with His grace, and Holy Spirit through transformative prayer so my heart and mind embrace healthier beliefs,

focus, motives, energy, and are led by the Holy Spirit through truth. This fruit is from the Holy Spirit through dependence and strategic prayer with Jesus' help; not through analyzing, and not through psycho-analysis.

Attempting to love like Jesus did in our own energy leads to a struggle that can't be won and invites plenty of self-pity; so, is self-defeating, and is impossible unless the sinful strongholds from the past are dealt with through prayer and wisdom. Those who seek to follow and obey Jesus and care about living out the Sermon on the Mount will make great strides in becoming healthy servants in the life, way, energy, spirit, and likeness belonging to Jesus.

Practicing the Golden Rule will get us out of our comfort zone. We do this not by just giving mental assent to the rule. But we imagine what it looks like and set out to do it. We may have blockages to making the Golden Rule practical at times and this calls for patience and perseverance. Unforgiveness, fears, pride, and lust can all be blocks to loving others in caring obedience to Jesus. Getting rid of these blocks is done through the strategy outlined in this book. Living out the Golden Rule is easier when I embrace and accept my cross: difficult circumstances and people, temptations, and the pull of my "sin nature" with the view of overcoming them through faith, hope, and love.

We will slowly learn to see things differently. Instead of seeing things as burdens, nuisances, and pains in the butts, we see them in healthier ways where we start doing something good with God's help; to contribute instead of acting like a black hole relationally. This will involve prayers where we join with God in faith to change our attitudes and the way we see and act. Wisdom means that we put to death living by our feelings alone and trusting Jesus to save us from our sins instead. Emotionless or shallow prayer achieves nothing!

We are made for work and work is made for us as the New Testament attests: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"²⁷. All too often the devil tries to steal the good that we can do by stoking our sense of offense, pride, and fear of seemingly being put down by being asked to do stuff that we know we should not have to be asked to do, and therefore loading on us guilt, shame, and low self-esteem. This is not the way it ought to be. If we pursue God's will, confess, and repent in prayer and receive His forgiveness after we fail, then we can overcome sloth. The intensity of prayer needs to be proportionate to the sin.

Also, I need to live in the moment if I want to Kill the stronghold of sloth. I need to kill indulging in too much daydreaming and useless fantasies. A way to do this is to focus on my opportunities and not the difficulties in the opportunities. This can give me a sense of achievement, and healthy pride, and will help eat away at my low self esteem and demanding that others make

²⁷ Ephesians 2:10

me happy.

People who dwell on injustices or unfairness can fall into self-pity, and land up having victim mentalities. And, also, land up having negative outlooks to life, and drawing negative things to themselves. This steals our joy which is a fruit of the Spirit. If joy is a fruit of the Spirit, then self-pity is a malady of the flesh which means it is sinful. The only ways to kill it is to not feed it, and pray strategically so that God can cleanse us from it with refreshing truth. Then, to practice thanksgiving for all that we receive from God and others.

I remember as a young child being summoned to do yard work while my sister and brother got to watch TV. I wept bitterly with great self-pity, screamed unfairness, and hated the labor. Why? Five reasons dealing with my direction or aim in life:

- 1) I had not my father's values. So, what I saw as important was immature, and only mixed with laziness and instant-self-gratification...not of creating something longer lasting and more enduring and less selfish.
- 2) I had not my father's vision, I did not have eyes to see the opportunity beckoning, and the ability to see the fruits that my labor could bring.
- 3) I had not my father's desires. My only reason for doing it was because I had to, not because it would bring beauty and pleasure to others.
- 4) I had not my father's willingness to sacrifice for something better. He was willing to give up the pleasures of entertainment for the pleasure of accomplishing something worthy of his time and efforts.
- 5) I had not my father's healthy commitment to persevere. I just wanted to get it over and done with.

To help kill the kind of sloth talked about here one might think one only needs to pray for healthier values, clearer vision, healthier desires, willingness to sacrifice, and the grace to commit to something greater. But, good as this may seem, it doesn't go far enough, and does not take responsibility for one's sins, and ignores the process of repenting which is always done in prayer. First, one needs to in prayer give up one's use of self-pity and of anger to get one's way, and give up the demands that others make one happy. Then, secondly, to dismantle one's unhealthy values using this procedure:

Step 1. **Write down one's false values when it comes to work (these are the lies one has believed): "_____"** (Not completely caring about the cause, thinking my life is more important than loving others through work, just wanting to get it over with, believing work can't be fun, not caring deeply about quality, just filling the allotted quotas, just showing up to collect a paycheck...etc.)

Step 2. **Write down the sins one has committed "_____"** (because of the false values and lies one believes). (Coasting, being lazy, wasting time, pretending to be a hard worker, criticizing coworkers, leaving extra work for coworkers, getting away with the minimum,

not taking responsibility when issues arrive...etc.)

Step 3. **Pray something like: Dear Jesus, I confess my sins of “_____” (cf. Step 2) and the lies that I believed that gave life to my false values “_____” (cf. Step 1) and I give them up with your help in faith. I receive your forgiveness and healing in faith both intellectually and emotionally. Please help me to renew my mind, values, and attitudes so I will have a healthy work ethic.**

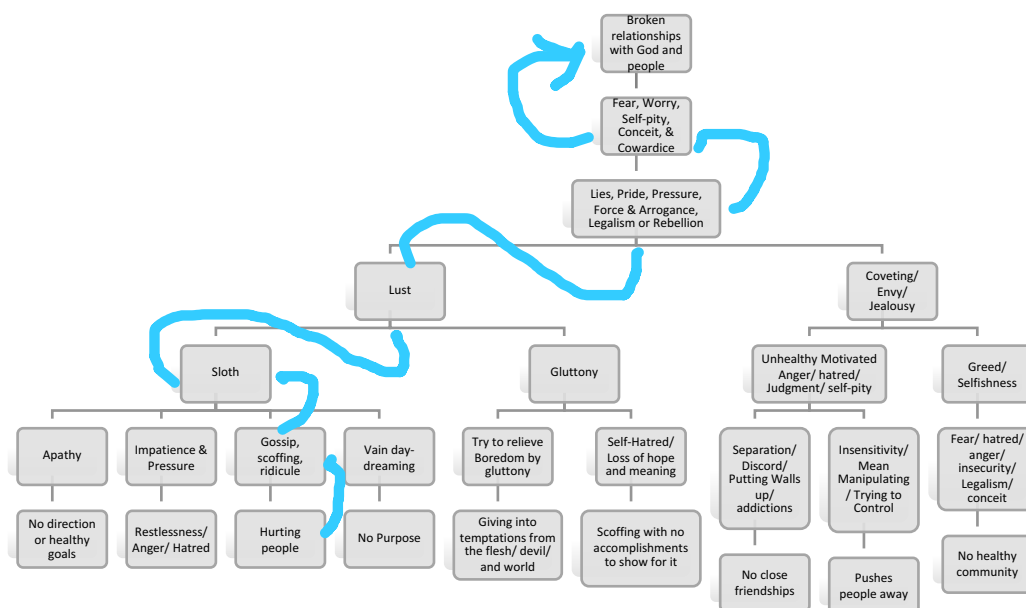
I now choose to live life with your lavish grace, and to live my life built on your truth Lord Jesus, thank you! Amen!

Example: Tackling Sloth in My Life:

The following lies became my hidden values when I was summoned to do yard work by my Dad (mentioned above), and they put a big burden of negativity into my attitudes towards work.

- 1) I believed the lie that work was not fun.
- 2) I believed the lie that work was not satisfying
- 3) I believed the lie that work was boring

I worked hard most of my life, but it was driven by an angry mean pressure, by duty, and not love, not joy, not pleasure, and without real peace and consolation in knowing I was doing something meaningful for others besides myself. Praying through these using “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” diagram below was the way to have victory over this stronghold of sloth in my life:



Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I confess that I have approached school and work by believing the above lies that led to sloth most my life. I give up the sloth and choose to give up believing these lies now with your help through faith. I confess that I consoled myself with the pleasures of sloth, instead of investing your energy in the aptitudes you gave me, this is lust, and I give this up with your help in faith. Instead of finding meaning and purpose in work and learning, I have put enormous amounts of pressure, hatred, and meanness on myself to achieve. I confess this as wrong and give up this strategy now with your help Lord Jesus through faith in you. I have been motivated by pride and fear, only concerned about how others saw my achievements, instead of loving them through the deeds. I give this up with your help now, and embrace your forgiveness and healing now through faith. Thank you, Father God, Lord Jesus, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

A Revelation Triggered:

I realized that this was not the only mother load. A short while later something else was triggered. Yes, my working-attitude did become healthier, but then an incident occurred where scoffing gushed out of me in the context of work. Someone with whom I was working, asked me to trade tasks, and I felt insulted, hurt, self-pitying, and angry as scoffing and ridicule were pouring out of my heart. Thankfully I hid what was happening within and decided to pray about it thoroughly when I had a chance.

More Prayer:

Lord God, I confess that my heart oozes with scoffing, ridicule, arrogance, anger and self-pity in the context of work. When I was asked to trade tasks, it triggered this dark energy within, and I'm sorry for allowing this to grow in my heart all these years. I have disrespected people made in your image thinking my honor, worth, and abilities are better than and more important than other people's abilities, feelings and worth. I give this all up with your help Lord Jesus in faith, because you are the great physician. Lord please take from me the above vices, and replace them with the virtues of caring, connecting, and empathy. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and healing me; I receive your graces and gifts emotionally as well as intellectually Lord Jesus; and I choose to become gracious towards those I meet daily out of your strength because you are my pillar of strength, never leaving me to my own devices. Thank you, and Amen.

§ 8.3: THE GREAT PITFALL OF SELF-PITY:

When a parent asks me to do a chore, or when a spouse asks me to do something (that Satan suggests with a lie is unfair), I can indulge in self-pity very easily. If I give into self-pity, then I am letting Satan spoil or steal a good deed that could have otherwise communicated to the parent or spouse that I love them! So, I'm determined to not let the devil steal my sense of positive purpose, healthy attitude, and helpful actions, with self-pity! While indulging in self-pity in this context I will be treating the parent, or spouse and God as pains in the royal butt because of my

sloth and selfishness. When this dynamic is at work then I am treating people as task masters, or worse, as slave drivers who I am trying to appease with a certain quota of works so they will seem happy (i.e. get off my case) so I can go back to my own lazy ways! I need to repent in prayer from the self-pity, and counter the lies of the devil with liberating truth that will help me to love and go the extra mile instead.

Remembering that positivity counters negativity (self-pity) because positivity attracts positive stuff whereas self-pity attracts negative stuff is a powerful incentive to give up self-pity.

Again, the battle against sloth repeatedly needs to be tackled. But it should not remain a stronghold for ever. We were wired for work, and work was prepared for us. Confession, and repenting in prayer are keys that ought to be practiced repeatedly. Then implementing the Golden Rule in the context of grace to replace the negative attitude of sloth.

Not having a work ethic is one problem. But we can have a desire to not be slothful but go about being industrious the wrong way. The wrong way is putting on oneself pressure, hatred, anger, meanness, hostility, self-revenge or self-blackmail, malice, hitting oneself over the head, trying to conform to rules and commands (the minimum required quotas), angrily, tooth and nail, mercilessly, heartlessly, fearfully, hoping to earn favor from God by our efforts, hoping to find peace through our efforts, hoping to find freedom in our strengths, hoping to “find all the things” through doing “work” self-righteously through angry pressure instead of approaching work through a gentle faith in Jesus who offers grace freely.

This is often aided by an Old Testament - Law mentality of: “I got to, I have to, and I must because the Law says I must; otherwise I’m not a good person and am on my way to hell” (think FEAR-MOTIVATION). Writing these last two-paragraphs has been difficult. All these words and bad motivations I have personally carried with me in one form or another. My heart and mind have been sick this way for way too long. Confessing it all (along with its history) gently, and repenting of it in prayer is key. It is conquered through relationship with Jesus, seeking to do His will (not overnight but day in and day out), but in the new way of the Spirit (God’s empowering presence) by going through a learning curve. We weren’t given to only coldly obey a minimum cold standard. We are given the warm person of Jesus and His Spirit who comes along side of us to help and counsel us urging us on to victory one battle at a time.

Also, focusing on a negative and passive set of laws (no matter how good) that try to bring fairness to protect our lower rights will not motivate us giving to people or sacrificially loving them because then we are only looking for fairness for ourselves. But focusing on Jesus and gently submitting to His command to “go the extra mile” is key to developing action motivated by caring for people with the guilt washed away through confession with the bad habits’ power broken through repentance and renewing the mind. Jesus does not invite us harshly, meanly,

and angrily to go the extra mile. Jesus does not force us, or put pressure on us to keep His commands. He is kind and gentle. We need to speak to ourselves the way Jesus speaks to us. It is God's kindness that leads us to repentance²⁸. We need to focus on Jesus and what He is saying to us, and not take the lonely road of an inner monologue with ourselves that achieves nothing but a stagnant lifeless interior and dead exterior-relational-love-life.

We need to start with being connected to what we care about and we find this place through two-way prayer to God. We can't care about everything. We all have different interests. We all have different gifting's. We all have different opportunities; we all have different callings. We can't be all things to all people all the time. That is not realistic. But we can do something passionately, useful, with caring, that is higher than ourselves, that has value in our eyes, that calls us out of ourselves, that helps other people feel good, relieved, at peace, hopeful, full, like somebody cares, and to feel happy.

§ 8.4: EXPLAINING & HEALING GLUTTONY:

Gluttony also grows out of lust in "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within. When I am not willing to be active in love I will resent action unless it makes me seemingly feel good within a short enough time frame; the quicker the action the more likely it is to gratify me. Food and drinking are quick and easy ways to feel good. The good I am "really" seeking is lasting peace. So, if I only want to feel good, gluttony will be a natural place to look if I seek peace independently from God.

The pathway to self-control is relationship with God. That means getting my bearings in conversation with God. Then when the Spirit gives consent to confess (by feeling, or connecting with) my commitments to seek pleasure or comfort from gluttony (and selfishness), its history, owning it, saying I am sorry for seeking peace in the wrong place, asking for forgiveness and receiving it from God with thanksgiving emotionally (not just intellectually) is where I've learned to start; then to repent in prayer from it. The repenting I do has to do with renewing my mind and giving up the lies I believe about what I am addicted to whether food, drink, shopping...etc. This process deals with my past, my guilt, and gives me a new hope, a new start with positive attitudes, and a healthier strategy to live life with. Getting in touch with my feelings/ attitudes/ expectations/ and energy behind my behaviors gets me in touch with what I am believing and thinking.

This gives me a chance to see my fallen values. Putting to death the unhealthy believing and thinking, and replacing it with positive submission (in grace) to the teachings and commands of Jesus is key to victory, because Jesus' truths set us free. Nature hates a vacuum, so we have to replace the old bad habits with newer healthier habits. Human anger is often how I have

²⁸ Cf. Romans 2:4

wrongly tried to motivate my change of habits. Recognizing this, catching myself going there, confessing it to God, and repenting from it in prayer is wise, and then to slowly steer my thoughts in healthier directions through prayer will help to complete the transformation. All negative emotions draw us to finding relief...so beliefs that create negativity need to be jettisoned and replaced with healthy, warm, and happy ones.

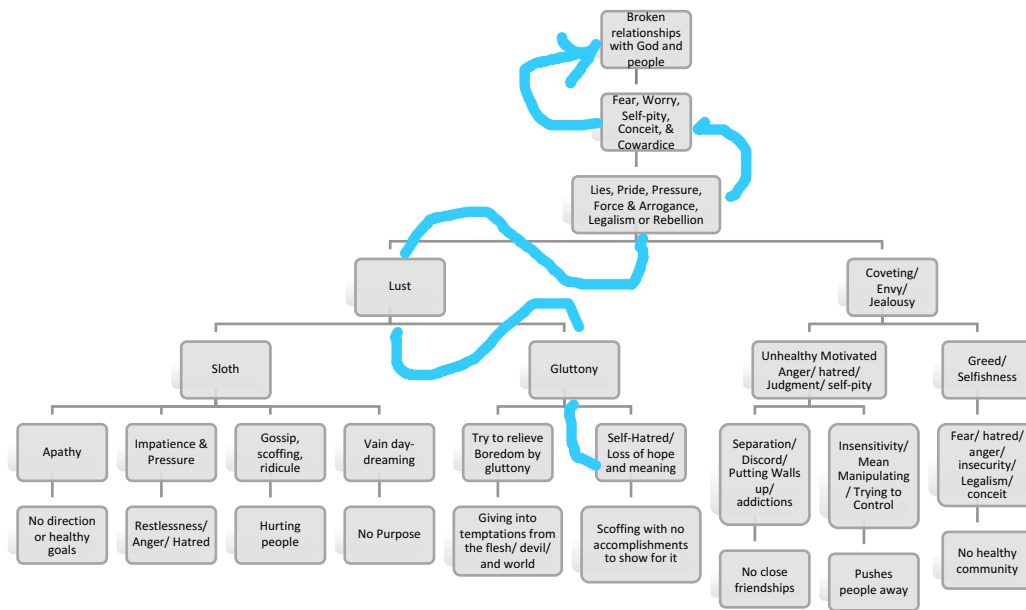
To further replace the stronghold of gluttony with something healthier, I need self-control which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. That means that it is a gift from the Holy Spirit. It is not a result of self-effort or self-will. To help to protect against gluttony one needs to live within some healthy boundaries set up by God so that we stay away from unnecessary confusion that leads to temptations.

Pursuing stillness and connection with God is the healthiest place to dwell through expectant faith as that is where the peace is. When you feel like eating then journal²⁹ instead...because you are really hungry for God...and if your days go well by simply journaling in the morning, then think how healthy you will be when you follow through on journaling as a replacement for over-eating. This helps us to commit to healthy thinking and values when it comes to what we eat and drink, and then to live for a purpose greater than pleasure like giving and receiving grace. Gluttony also has the effect of making us hate the perceptions we have of our bodies. This also needs to be confessed with the same intensity as it is felt. Gluttony is also hard on the pocketbook. Winning this battle against gluttony daily will help us live within our budgets. If we only find short term freedom from gluttony through the steps outlined here then we need to go deeper and build on truths we already know but have not utilized, and pray for new revelations. God does not give us a serpent when we ask for bread.

Example: Tackling Gluttony:

As a child, I grew up enjoying food. But in my teens, I remember buying plenty of junk food to gluttonize late at night to push away the boredom and emptiness I felt. In my university days, I became addicted to Coca Cola but gave that up when I met Jesus. I remember one-time hearing my dad voicing his concern about his belly and me laughing at him. But when I landed up with schizophrenia and being put on medication, I used food to feel good as little else made me feel good. I put on a lot of weight, and so I then began to hate my body.

²⁹ On how to journal cf. Mark Virkler's books on Journaling Prayer



Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I confess my sin of self-hatred, and my judgments on my Dad so long ago. I give up through faith in you, my self-hatred, and judging people for their bodies and receive your forgiveness and healing intellectually as well as emotionally. I confess my overeating as unhealthy, and I ask you to forgive me, I give this up right along with attempting to use anger to stop eating now with your help in faith. I admit pleasure seeking has been my goal for decades, and not caring whether things are healthy or not: this is lust (pleasure is not more important than truth). I give up with your help Lord Jesus, the lie that pleasure is more important than truth. It isn't! I'm sorry for living life on my own terms, trying to save myself or let food save me. I admit I'm afraid of emptiness and having believed the lie that I could fill it with whatever I wanted with no health consequences. Thank you for forgiving me, and healing me. I invite you into my life, into my emptiness, and I welcome your peace and grace which surpasses all understanding. I choose to submit to you, and resist the devil. Please help me to think about what is healthy from now onwards, and not be lust focused or try to motivate healthy actions through my anger or self-pity. Thank you, Jesus. Amen!

Dismantling Inhaling of my food:

I have a history: years, day in and day out, meal after meal, rushing the pleasure and seeking peace in eating my food, so much wanting to feel consolation, pleasure and peace. The following is a diagnosis of where my eating habits have brought me to:

Lies: the faster I eat the more peace I get; and the quicker I inhale my food the more peace I feel.

Repetition: over and over...filling the emptiness...with the idols of food, pop, and drink...

Hunger: hungry for peace...meaning...happiness...that is so elusive, because my strategy does not work but I keep going back to it.

Peace: this is what I wanted/ want most... and am still seeking it in this area...

Prayer:

Lord God, I admit that I have forsaken you the fount of life for food, drink, pop, milkshakes...that are meant to give energy...but I used them as my God-substitute...please Lord God forgive me, I'm sorry, I need you more than I know, I need you now, I needed you then...but I took what seemed most natural...food, drink, milkshakes, burgers, fries, mayo, salt, buns, and ice cream to give me relief for short periods of time... please forgive me for inhaling my food, I give it up now in faith with your help and grace Lord Jesus, and I ask you the trinity to fill me instead with your peace and life. For you are the beauty, majesty, peace, hope, and the desire of this man's life. I don't need to, nor want to inhale my food any longer...I choose to treat food with the respect it deserves. With your help Jesus, I ask for the gift of self-control to replace my gluttony. Thank you for your peace that is beyond description, that is what I really want, and I exchange my gluttony with your constant, caring presence, peace, and grace so I don't have to worship at the alter of food anymore. Amen!

A Further Revelation:

When we judge people and care more for our reputations than the spiritual and physical health or the wellbeing of these people, then this becomes a barrier to self-control in our personal lives. I needed to confess this and repent in faith from it, and God granted me a new measure of self-control.

§ 8.5: STABILITY, SELF-CONTROL AND RESOURCES:

Seeking to do God's will is so important to stabilizing us. If the above strategy does not dislodge the stronghold of gluttony, then looking at the book *Expanding The Twelve Steps* which includes two chapters on Cycles of addiction that can be very helpful. If these don't help then going deeper because God is deeper still is the path to take.

Self-control comes from being at rest inside of us; which comes from the peace the Holy Spirit gives. The Holy Spirit's gift of self-control also comes as we learn to think and believe more healthily and trust Jesus to save us from our sins enabling us to love and value: people, nature and other healthy tasks instead of finding unhealthy empty happiness in creature comforts. In submitting to God, we seek His will which is higher than ours, and that means seeking to think and act healthily in our decisions...this is called walking in holiness.

Sometimes, confessing the struggle to God and simply speaking directly to the "sin nature" -

attitudes when gluttony is at the door and saying: “I accept you, but I don't need you right now”, and pray, “I give it up with your help Jesus through faith” and inviting Jesus’ grace and peace into our empty space to set us free to love and not sin, gives us self-discipline, and self-control to conquer the temptation. As for food, eating healthy instead of eating to lose weight is wiser.

The pull of the “sin nature” ebbs and flows and constantly seeks opportunities to wreak havoc in our spiritual lives. It can motivate gluttony and sloth too if we give into it. I have found that when I rely exclusively on principles to attempt putting to death gluttony, then my faith is misplaced. Jesus is my Savior...so spending time with Him is wise and fitting.

In this book, I have not exhausted all the reasons for people not having self-control, so when one has done everything one knows to quit, but just can’t seem to get over that hump in one’s path, then one puts one’s faith in Jesus to save oneself and waits (i.e. searches more deeply) for His truth to set oneself free. Jesus is a reliable Savior: He will never leave us nor forsake us even when in the natural things seem absurd.

9 EXPLAINING & HEALING MY COVETING BRANCHES OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN

Coveting/ envy/ and jealousy grow out of pride on the right side of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil”. Coveting has the meaning of seeking stuff that others don't necessarily have, but that we want and see as our just deserve, our feather in the hat, or our jewel in our crown that amounts to an elevated status in our community. Envy sees God as a miser. It is blind to grace, devoid of grace and so wrongly blames God for the supposed lack in one’s life. When we have envy and jealousy they are both aimed at people who have something we don't have.

Envy is a jealous and hateful attitude. It demands being first when it comes to the loyalty others show, or to have the best attributes or abilities when compared to others. Self-pity can be envy and jealousy’s servant. Repeated pointed accurate, gentle, and genuine prayer is a key to help breaking these strongholds through grace. If we are envious of a person, then like pope Francis advises: give thanks to God in prayer for Him being so generous with the gifts He gave to the persons we envy. This works if we respect God and are receiving His grace and are open to sharing it. Faith in a good and generous God also helps to kill the stronghold of envy in us. Also, giving thanks to God that one gets to give instead of only receiving stuff all the time also helps kill envy and “actually” aids us in being generous. Jealousy is more about getting stuff than getting a better reputation. Envy is negative in nature and by itself can force a person to seek relief through other means and therefore also starts addictions like eating comfort food. There are some little “t”-truths that help one to become free of coveting/ envy/ jealousy. But I need to (1) deal with the guilt of past deposits of coveting/ envy/ jealousy to have a fresh start, and (2) dismiss envy and jealousy’s servants: self-pity and angry pressure in the right contexts for freedom to come, and this begins with confessing my sins to God.

Confessing (by feeling, or connecting with) my envy, its history, owning it, saying it is wrong, saying I am sorry, asking for forgiveness and receiving it from God with thanksgiving is where I start; and then to repent in prayer from it helps to restore my sanity. I then submit to God by jettisoning self-pity and angry pressure through grace and resisting the devil; being open to the Holy Spirit as I learn to think more healthily and trust Jesus to save me from my envy, and enable me to love as I put to death envy by saying yes to grace and thanksgiving. But I need to be mindful, aware of where I am at, and fight with truth, and not try to wrestle my self-pitying-feelings all by themselves with fleshly/ mean forceful energy. Instead I fight with strategic-accurate, gentle wisdom and genuine-prayer and faith in Jesus that brings grace or unconditional love into my life to help me care for people and to put to death envy, when it tries to reassert itself in my attitudes, so that my mind and attitudes are slowly renewed with little “t”-truths and grace.

Jesus calls us to altruism, to seeking the highest good of those we meet. Jesus calls us to love others like ourselves. When we are purely absorbed with only our own whims, cares, and personal desires, always watching that things are fair, with self-pity when we don't get our own ways, we are not happy campers, and in fact living in the flesh not the Spirit. The flesh and the Spirit are opposed. The flesh can't please the Spirit. The flesh can't submit to the Spirit. We are designed to give unselfishly and so feel happiest when we do so and share in the mind of Christ. We find meaning and purpose in giving honor, respect, and value to others, but fleeting happiness in hoarding position and power for ourselves. Position and wealth don't fill the void within. Moving to seeing people as treasures as opposed to earthly wealth and position is a journey worth taking. People who get this are usually the happiest of us all; they value, receive, and give grace. We get there by understanding grace and welcoming it into our lives daily through communion with God through Jesus Christ.

As far as deciding whether one has been selfish or not, the following insight or angle is very important. My former supervisor put a sign up in our work place that said: "Event" plus "Reaction" equals "Outcome", or simply:

$$E+R=O$$

I discussed it with her, and the conversation leads to the next three-paragraphs:

The time between an event and its outcome is the place where we decide what we want and how we ought to react! This is important because it says we do have time and don't have to make quick decisions always. Quick decisions are not always wise, they can be made through fear and panic, and so bring judgment and anger from those making requests from us. Jesus didn't always immediately choose to give what others requested, and that is my experience of Him in prayer too.

One might think that one is selfish because one does not want to immediately drop a current project to help someone with a newer project. But, this is not always true.

Sometimes, the new project can wait, and sometimes not. But the wise thing to do is ask when the new project needs to be done by, and what its priority is compared to the current project, and then to decide when to tackle the new project based on the answers to these questions. If we don't do this, we don't give ourselves breathing room, and we will be accused by the devil of being selfish and inflexible especially if we give a flat out "No" to the request. But this doesn't mean one is actually greedy or selfish, maybe just not wise in weighing one's options or prioritizing. Using time wisely, can help one to respect people, show one does care, while not leaving one's priorities out of the picture. When we do this, we are less likely to make rash decisions that may be or actually look like selfish decisions and cause people to get angry with us.

§ 9.2: EXPLAINING & HEALING: JUDGING & UNHEALTHILY MOTIVATED ANGER:

Judging grows out of pride in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil”, and happens when we give our opinions on other people. We tell the truth when we speak honestly about ourselves. When somebody does something that we dislike, then in judging them, we may do any of the following: accuse, blame, insinuate, label, call names, castigate, use hateful and negative speech, and cast a bad light on them, hurt them, and make them angry. This may make them want to defend themselves, and judge us back out of anger. But when we tell the truth, we will use “I”-statements that say:

“I feel “_____” when “_____” because “_____”, and would like “_____”

with a clean, non-hostile energy that appeals to the nobleness of the accused, and not their anger or supposed shame. Telling the truth never puts anyone down.

In repenting from judgments or inner vows, we need to expose the lies behind the judgments we make and replace them with truth in order to become free. For instance, if we believe and endorse that people deserve being laughed at when they do something stupid, then we will laugh at them whenever they do something stupid in our eyes. Just praying: “I give up my judging of ‘so and so’ with your help Jesus” does not go far enough. We must get specific, expose the unhealthy values and lies we are holding onto behind the judgments, confessing them to God, and repenting from them in prayer in order for freedom to result.

Having malice in our hearts can be hard to detect and written up as just an anger problem. But I have found that judging and anger can be triggered by a general commitment in one’s affairs to repaying evil for evil. Giving up this revenge-mentality with Jesus help in faith “really” helps us respond to disappointments, broken expectations, and potential boundary violations with kindness, tolerance, and non-jerk-like-attitude-behaviors.

I now know that healthy anger is like an alarm. When we have it, it says something is wrong within or outside of me that needs to be addressed. I can feel injustices of rights being violated...or my expectations not being met...or I may believe my supposed entitlements have been compromised when I feel anger. What I believe may need to be dealt with, reassessed and repented from when what I believe does not reflect reality, truth or honesty, and does not foster healthy relating.

I have learned that if I believe my anger is immoral, then I will get angry with myself for my anger, and that just screws me up interiorly to the point of confusion, self-pity, exasperation and more anger. These blind me to what the real issues really are.

When judging causes (or increases) my anger, then dealing with the judging will clear up (much of) the anger (that ought to be a short-term visitor not a long-term visitor, i.e. it shouldn’t

become a resentment). Anger that is not relieved or dealt with in healthy ways poison my mind/ heart/ speech/ energy/ and compromises my connectedness because I'm likely using it to try to get my own way. Also, anger that is not dealt with or is stuffed turns into resentments, addictions, hostility, bitterness, insensitivity, and hatred and needs to be addressed too if I want to be healthy spiritually.

Given that I am allowed to be angry with others when injustices occur, it follows that others are allowed to be angry with me too. Anger is about how one feels when one perceives an injustice. We need to set people free to process their anger. And we ought to process our anger healthily too. We can't necessarily go around telling people they ought not be angry. And, we shouldn't stuff or bury our own anger either.

Injustices happen, and happen often and cause anger. There are those injustices that happen because people are led that way by the devil, and then there are those things that are systemic...inherent to the created order marred by sin and having pushed God away, causing frustration, headaches, confusion, pain, anger and torment. No sense in blaming God because our darkness can't cast out darkness.

§ 9.3: A HEALTHY WAY TO DEAL WITH ANGER AND BROKEN EXPECTATIONS:

When I have expectations that aren't being met, then the unhealthy thing to do is to get stuck, i.e. become full of self-pity and pouting or using the tool of anger on the person who has triggered my anger because I want something from the person. Sometimes my anger is so hidden because my self-pity is so strong emotionally. If I feel self-pity then often angry pressure is there too; and vice-versa; meaning both need to be addressed in prayer.

The healthy thing to do when I'm told "no" by somebody when I am expecting a "yes" is to respect the person and give up with Jesus help through faith in prayer the sought-after expectation if it is blocking my love for the person, and accept that the person in question has said "no", and then to move onto loving those people in the situation that triggered the anger. Re-calibrating one's expectations regularly sets others and ourselves free from dogmatism, and so is very healthy for all the people involved.

When I have expectations that are not met, instead of just getting angry I can also judge the person who did not come through for me. And the inclination is to think I need to forgive the person who did not meet my expectations. But what I "really" need to do is repent in prayer from my judging, so that I can find peace. Judging people is always wrong. I'm learning that using "I"-statements in telling the truth can be helpful in processing my worries in non-judgmental ways, and helps to set me free from confusion and burdens.

Most people do their best in what they seek to achieve. Accepting this is one way to not get nit-picky, anal, negative and judgmental.

§ 9.4: DEALING WITH ANGER AND REJECTION:

In dealing with anger, rejection is a BIGGY. In speaking about Jesus, an Old Testament writer said:

"He was rejected and despised by people...familiar with pain..."³⁰

When I am rejected I can handle it in my own fallen way or in Jesus' way. My way was to not process it at all, to try to push it down, to get and stay angry when I was very young, and to plot getting even through withdrawal, or to pretend nothing happened at all because I felt such pain (note: when I pretend, then I am putting on a mask, and I do so because I think it will save me from my shame and make me look strong). None of these feel good or are healthy, and steal from one's human destiny. And it often can get laminated onto how one views reality in a really unhealthy way. I now know how to process rejection/ anger/ pain in a healthy way thanks to Jesus. This means not being a masochist, and not being a doormat either.

When I inflexibly demand my rights without giving people choice, then I am asking for rejection, defiance, low self-esteem on my part, and getting stuck emotionally from a lot of "No's" from all the people I will disagree with. When I go this route, I use dark negative energy, and things get ugly. Giving people a way out, or the ability to dialogue, express where they are at, and to what they can commit to or not is a more humble and flexible path to take.

The person who can't take a "No!" for an answer may be stubbornly selfish, envious, conceited and proud. If this is the case, then they have problems accepting that others have a right to say no. Because of this they are prone to ugly angry outbursts, and plenty of self-pity. This needs to be healed through the medicines found in Jesus: His presence, grace and truth.

Jesus was rejected to the point of being crucified and left for dead. Jesus handled rejection not by going to a place of resentment, but by pouring Himself out in love from death to resurrection, by seeing us with care (He said: "they know not what they do"), and forgiving us (He said: "Father forgive them"), and declaring "it is finished" when it came to our forgiveness. Jesus did not run from His pain, hide from His accusers, say He deserved it, or numb His pain. He navigated the pain by caring for people, by loving people, and focusing on the joy set before Him: people. Jesus did not see the cross as a problem but an opportunity to show His love to the full. Rejection is not the end of life as we know it. There is life after rejection, and when we navigate rejection healthily, there is joy waiting for us; as the anger does not have to be eternal.

I have found that when I had the fear of rejection (with walls coming up when triggered) it was rooted in hurts and rejection in my past. Tracing the paths in "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" that maps out this fallen structure within me, and praying through it all the way to the

³⁰ Isaiah 53:3

roots: the hurts and fears, and forgiving the agents of my hurts along with replacing lies with truth is a healthy path to take. Then going deeper if the fear of rejection gets triggered again. The root might have many branches. When this is dealt with other triggers can be dealt with too if they exist.

I have found that raised walls in me get lowered after I've been rejected when I deal healthily with the remnants of conceit that get triggered within me in certain contexts. When I do struggle with rejection, praying through conceit/ fear as outlined in this book, and renewing my mind with the truth that God loves me does help me to move on in positivity, kindness, with walls coming down so that I'm able to care for the people in my life.

§ 9.5: ANGER AND PERFECTIONISM:

Anger often comes from a "religious" person because he or she perceives that the Law has been broken in some context and that people are on their way to Hell because of it and that voicing anger for the sin will somehow bring repentance. I have struggle with this mentality personally for a long time. I now have a better grasp on it, thanks to a revelation. The following broke into my mind:

The Law expects perfection. I'm not the Law, so I shouldn't expect perfection from others or myself. Because when I expect perfection I'm always angry, inflexible, hard, unkind, rigid, ungracious, and unhappy.

This brought some freedom (and breathing room), but it slowly eroded as I felt we still needed some sort of standard to live by instead of what looked more and more like a license to sin. But then I asked myself: "Am I under Law or grace?" The answer was obvious: "I'm under grace." So, if I'm not under Law, then how can I expect perfect compliance to the Law from others? Is there now "no standard" at all for anyone?

Yes, there are standards. For me, the standards are Jesus' commands found in the New Testament which are much higher than the Old Testament (OT) Law, and in living out Jesus' commands the Law is "actually" fulfilled through His grace. So, no matter what people do, according to Jesus' standard, I'm asked to love people unconditionally, and this is what Jesus asks me to do. This kills the expectation within me of perfectionism from others, and myself. Grace is deciding to love somebody whether or not they do good, do bad, or have apathy. I like it when people are that way to me, so I want to be that way to them: "Do to others what you want them to do to you" which is the Golden Rule. Mental assent to this rule is not good enough...I choose to live it out with Jesus' grace when the opportunity makes itself present.

I live out grace by dealing with my past sins first, and then my present sins through confession, and repentance in prayer when I remember having done or "actually do" judge, have the emotions of anger, hostility, hardness, hatred, un-grace, blackness, void-ness of empathy or

sympathy, dryness, and no feelings of warmth of compassion, when the rule is more important than the person. Or, to say to the sin energy of anger and self-pity in the context of judging, “I accept you but I don’t need you right now”, and pray, “I give this up with your help Jesus through faith.” Then, to submit to God, resist the devil, and seek to live out of Jesus’ grace.

But what about those not under God’s grace? They have consciences just like anyone else. For some people, they embrace the Law (which was God’s minimum OT standard), and this helps them until they discover grace. Even those, without the OT written Law, are created in God’s image, and so they have some sense of right and wrong (often better than mine).

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convince the world of sin. So, it is not my responsibility or job to convict others of sin or be a moral policeman (I’m sure they feel guilty enough). Jesus said for me to not judge or condemn people. When I’m angry it is because I have judged a person. When I’ve judged, I have used a standard that I don’t even keep perfectly myself, so I am judged because I have, in pride, put myself above another, and so are also a hypocrite.

So, “grace” and the Golden Rule set me free from judging and anger that come from the expectations of perfectionism tied to the Law (and personal anal codes of conduct).

Trying to put out a fire by trying to blow away the smoke is not smart. We can do this with anger a lot of the time trying to control it, stuffing it, and wrestling with it, but we should not feel guilty about the actual anger when it acts like a warning bell; we just need to process it healthily. In this context anger is a sign that we need to act, and be responsible for our envy and judging. Fear leads to pride. Pride leads to envy and envy to judging. Judging leads to anger or even rage. Rage can very easily birth hatred too. So, getting rid of and processing my fear, pride, envy, and judging will help get rid of and process my anger in this context.

When our boundaries are violated, or people get into our personal spaces, the “sin nature” can or will rear its ugly head and try to use “anger and self-pity” to resolve the violation... I have found that when I’m put into such situations, simply confessing the struggle to God and speaking directly to my “sin nature”- attitude saying, “I accept you, but don't need you right now”, and pray, “I give this up with your help Jesus through faith” and inviting Jesus’ peace in: the Holy Spirit, to overcome the sin within, lifts me above the dark pull and I instead am able to love unconditionally giving grace instead of intolerance to the people who triggered me to feel uncomfortably mean and full of un-grace.

Practicing principles can sometimes become like trying to uphold the Law and one lands up feeling powerlessly adrift. So, I have learned that when principles don’t seem to have any power, then I need to put my faith in Jesus to save me because there are things I’m not seeing that Jesus does. And when I do put my faith in Him, He always comes through... eventually.

§ 9.6: ANGER, LAW AND GRACE:

Law “focused” people only get angry, and think God agrees with their indignation, when they see people individually or communally walking away from God into sin. And if only the angry-belief remains in them that the people deserve Hell, then such people are Law-focused.

Jeremiah was an OT prophet called “the weeping prophet” because he connects with where God was emotionally as Jews of his time lived out the consequences of their sins. When we weep over a person’s separation from God, then we are grace-focused, and have the heart of Jesus. Jesus weeps tears of living water: known as the Holy Spirit: also known as Love.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, God the Father is not full of wrath when the younger son claims his inheritance and walks off into sin. Rather the Father knows the boy is unwise, immature and doesn’t know how good he has it. So, the Father in love lets the boy go off to seek his fortune, knowing that the lessons learned will bring him back to sanity when he remembers how good the Father really was and is. And that happens often with God.

§ 9.7: ANGER & JUDGMENT THAT INEVITABLY LEADS TO ADDICTIONS:

Pride and envy both spawn unhealthily-motivated anger in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within. Pride and envy are very hard on others. If we have anger issues and don't forgive then judging leads to resentments. The anger we feel towards the person will be justified in our eyes and will create negativity: emptiness, discord, sourness, coldness, hardness, depression, and bitterness but since we were made for joy we will seek to nurse these negative feelings with pleasures if we don’t forgive and this will create compulsions towards whatever pleasures come first. My book *Expanding The Twelve Steps* is a constructive way to forgive and deal with such addictions.

When we forgive, the negative burden lifts, the anger is given up, and the judgment is lifted. But we are not free yet. If our envy, pride, conceit, and self-pity are not dealt with we will fall into judging repeatedly as well as into the addiction, and no one wants that. Therefore, we need to deal with the (envy< pride< fear< conceit and self-pity<hurt or foolishness) in our hearts with the medicine mentioned above. When these are dealt with regularly we will find less money being spent on our addictions and more on others, hence giving will become a way of life. With freedom from addictions we will move onto the way of love. Jesus is the way to love.

§ 9.8: ANGER & A DEMANDING SPIRIT:

When one has a demanding spirit...it means one is (whether hidden or revealed) harsh, mean, angry, without good will, nasty, forcefully expecting others to give, and comply with one's wishes as though it is an unquestionable divine right. The energy is ugly, the attitude is jerk-like, and it does not respect the people it is aimed at.

I am convinced that I can't demand things from others that I think will make me happy. That includes everyone in my life. If I demand it then it is no longer a gift, and isn't done in freedom,

in joy, hope, and altruism. So, what about my expectations? What sort of place do they have? Do I have to watch myself carefully from crossing over from expecting to being demanding? Yes!

After trying to love from my heart while learning to practice humility in brokenness, pain and suffering for years, I went through a confusing, disorientating, “woe-is-me”, “nothing satisfies me” period with the “inability to ‘really’ focus on meaningful goals”, “lacking altruistic motivation”, “having dryness interiorly”, “having feelings of unfairness”- wanting to accuse God, “lacking the power to love” deeply or even shallowly and basically having no wind in my sails.

I felt depressed and sad, like I was at the end of myself, like all my efforts were futile, knowing what I wanted I could not demand from others: God first, family second, and friends next.

Because when I demand (which is negative in nature) I seek my own which is not what love is, and if people comply, then there is a good chance it isn't done freely, genuinely, healthily, and caringly when they respond to my bad energy. I'd rather people be genuinely caring, than doing things out of a guilt trip instigated by me, or out of some sense of obligation, or out of fear of my anger or my disapproval; or fear of me rejecting them not complying with my wishes.

I found it freeing to pray through all the relating I was involved in where I had a demanding spirit. A person with a strong demanding spirit does not bend easily, pouts a lot when they don't get their way, and manages to find convenient excuses to not give or go the extra mile. I've been there and done that.

Where do “demanding” spirits come from? They start out with expectations, and when fear/ self-pity/ anger/ pride/ and selfishness come into the picture they become demanding. It is self-preservation gone bad. Giving up these expectations along with my fear, self-pity, anger, pride, and selfishness is key to giving up a demanding spirit.

§ 9.9: ANGER & JUDGMENT THAT LEADS TO SHALLOWNESS:

God's love is not coercive. He does not threaten or use force to get people to choose Him or His ways. Our love is real when it is not motivated by the possibility of punishment, wrath, anger, and threats of Hell. There are boundaries that God has set in place regarding acceptable moral behavior, and He warns us of the consequences of walking outside those limits. But, God does not come down hard on us because we sinned, instead sin has its own inherent consequences because we usually reap what we sow except for grace and mercy. The idea that God is some kind of angry- cosmic- police- enforcer needs to be jettisoned to help peace to reign in the heart and for another root to judgmentalism to be uprooted. Those who live under the threats of their god, live under fear, and may very well be inclined to judge other people because they feel called to imitate their god.

In having success against judgmentalism we need to jettison and be wary of seeing God as coercive. When we see God as Love, then it is easier to work through our anger/ or judgmental

strongholds as described here.

When I have an unhealthily motivated anger which is defined as being rooted in the structure: judging mentality< envy< pride< fear, conceit, and self-pity<resentment or judgment, I will forever be drawing lines in the sand unless the structure can be dismantled. By that I mean that I won't find pleasure in people too easily (I may very well hate them or be unable to love them because of blockages in my thinking and heart). I will have this negative energy about me and it will push me away from others and them from me. This will only validate my belief that people deserve my judgments (and I possibly land up being a hypocrite too because I let things slide when I do the same things that pisses me off when others do them). Hence, I will have less intimacy, be more insensitive, and tend to isolate from others. I will not be able to value people for who they are and that means I will have superficial relationships.

Truths that help to kill judging are to sincerely believe that "everyone is special in their own way"; to see the line between good and evil as going through each person's heart and not through empires, traditions, cultures, groups, and people; and to give up an "us=good vs. them=evil" mentality.

To kill my judging mentality, I must understand the difference between judging and telling the truth. Giving an opinion about someone else is judging, whereas giving my honest opinion about myself is truth telling. The reason why I am very sorely tempted into thinking judgmental thoughts and to want to follow through on judging people is because I feel injustices have been visited on me. Even when I recognize that Jesus commanded me to not judge, I am pulled this way to try to make things right because I think that if I don't speak up things will get worse. This tension occurs because I don't know how to speak my truth gently. Judging attacks whereas speaking the truth does not. Truth speaking involves using "I"-statements that own my feelings in conversations with those who hurt me and are more likely to illicit understanding and change (although those who don't care may laugh me off) whereas, when I judge, then I blame and put people on the defensive, and this will not bring healing by itself. Healing of the relationship will come after only if there is forgiveness and understanding on both sides.

Years ago, I was promised an opportunity that was not coming through for me. I was tempted to get bitter, hostile, and I had many judgmental thoughts towards the person I thought was responsible for reneging on his promise. But when it came time to confront the person I did not blame him, I said how I felt, I did not vent, hate, scream injustice, or judge the person. A few days later the opportunity came my way. I now know the person did not feel judged by me, and he was warmed by my response to his cold shoulder. I see this as a powerful example of the difference between judging and telling the truth.

Again, to kill the judging fully we will need to be healed from all the negative attitudes:

(envy<pride< arrogance<fear<conceit, and using self-pity, and anger to motivate change) that are in our hearts by using the medicines from this book. In killing these we will kill the judgmentalism and superficialness in our lives and people will be attracted to our positive energy. To stay free, and love supernaturally we need to care for people more, grow in thankfulness, and trust in Jesus.

After one has done a lot of work Killing the strongholds of pride and related attitudes (one's such as judging), one will have more clarity and connectedness in one's mind...and one will be able to see just how childish or immature one's old thought-patterns, attitudes, and desires look like compared to one's state after working "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" diagram through the strategic prayer strategy outlined in this book.

Certain situations will trigger certain thoughts that will trigger these immature black and white childlike reactions/ attitudes to stuff that was not handled healthily or properly in the past that threaten to explode in the present. For the longest time, I still wanted to go to a place of childish judging in certain areas, and I realized I needed to use "I"-statements to healthily process my feelings in these areas. Sometimes that is all it takes, but sometimes I need to examine my beliefs, and thinking behind the judging that triggered my immature meltdowns so that I can trade them in for wise, mature, and realistic beliefs/ thoughts that can be tied to gentle, kind, patient, and peaceful expressions/ mechanics/ behaviors/ speech/ and relating to others when it comes to the people and situations that were triggers to hostile judging before. All this positivity is made possible through confession and repenting in faith with Jesus help, His teachings, commands, and promises all in the form of grace and truth along with the person of Jesus giving Himself to me continually. It does not work if we only give mental assent to these truths, we got to trust it all where the rubber meets the road (in the face of the negative, mean, hostile, bitter, self-pitying attitudes/ beliefs) and move onto grace, and to choose to dispense grace to others instead.

There are certain things that siblings and parents can do to us that trigger certain "really" childish and immature reactions even now in our adulthood. Confessing our baggage, and giving up these reactions in prayer such as judging, whining, complaining, being hostile, cold, and mean will help us to jettison our emotional baggage and help to set us free from being triggered into choosing immature behaviors.

§ 9.10: ANGER & JUDGMENT THAT LEADS TO MORAL POLICING:

Another bad fruit from envy is that I will become territorial and intolerant (mean) towards those who come too close for comfort and cross my boundaries, and those who do things I find immoral. This is where learning about compassion, and non-violence as a pathway to resolving disputes that Jesus championed is so very important. This can only be done through truth and

grace. The meek are slow to anger, and knowing how to channel anger is so invaluable. But envy will produce intolerance and this needs to be dealt with first, along with the pride, fear, and self-pity in our hearts as found in “tree of knowledge of good and evil” within. Humility is what will result...and it will help give me enemy love that leads to non-violence as the pathway to healing broken relationships or conflicts. This is far from doing nothing.

Moreover, taking a close look at the tone and energy in our speech is also important. Do we call people derogatory names (behind their backs)? Is there meanness in our words? Is there self-pity behind our words? Do we put people down (i.e. do we put them into negative boxes)? Do we hurt people with our words? Do we rob hope from people? Are we hostile? Do we try to manipulate others to try and get our own way? Do we throw stones at people (judge them before they are spoken to)? If so, then we have crooked tongues.

For me knowing that, “It is God’s kindness that leads me to change for the better” is helping me in how I treat others because if it works for God it will work for my relationships too. Confessing and owning the developmental history of these vices and bad fruits in my life to God, receiving forgiveness and healing in faith, repenting in prayer from this stronghold, and renewing one’s mind with healthy truth and grace is the path to take. Then to submit to God and resist the devil. Changing how one speaks won’t happen overnight...but it can be done gradually through heartfelt prayer as truth and wisdom and grace come into play.

Understanding and embracing the grace that comes from God, and jettisoning my attachments to my lower rights (when needed), dark demands or impulses for personal-fairness to be meted out at every turn will help to kill moral policing and make me open and strong in kindness. Love often means giving up selfish interests; love does not seek its own. The NT calls us to believe the best about those we meet³¹. When we do this, we see people as having been made in the image of God, that they were made for God, that they are called to love, that Jesus’ intention towards them is altruistic, caring, and hope-filled in nature. Nothing changes out of loading people down with guilt. Supernatural change comes from grace, kindness, caring, and seeing people the way God does: with love. If we seek to be mean to a person who is mean in order to try to get the mean person to change for the better, then we are deluded.

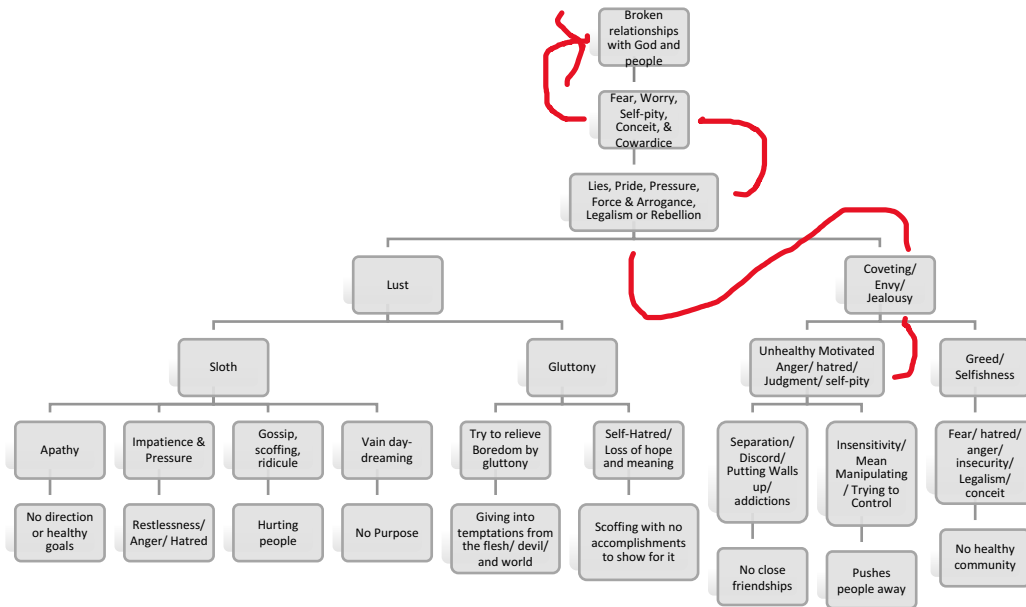
Saying “Yes” to the Golden Rule in the context of dispensing “grace” and accepting God’s will are powerful tools meant to replace judging with restorative-justice and mercy.

Anger can show up when people withhold what I wrongly think is my just deserve. Like, when I do something wrong to someone, and I confess and apologize to the person but they don’t immediately forgive me. I don’t deserve to be forgiven. I need to set people free to process the hurts I inflicted on them, and to journey to forgiveness in their own time. Love is not coercive.

³¹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Love sets people free with no manipulation, threats, or strings attached. Yes, Jesus requires them to forgive...but that is between them and Him. Like Jesus taught me that I shouldn't judge or condemn. The Holy Spirit will convince, we don't have to go around and preach condescendingly, and try to convict people through guilt, anger, shame, and fear. Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. God convinces us through His kindness, with neither anger nor hostility. I need to use my spiritual-mirror to see where I am at.

Example (Giving Up "me vs. them" Judging):



Lord Jesus, I confess my judging, envy, pride, cowardly fear, and hurt in the context of all my relationships. In this vein, I give up with your help me judging people by thinking: "I'm=intelligent vs. them=stupid"; and I give up with your help my envy which says: "they always have the advantage, f—k this pickle I find myself in"; I also give up with your help my pride which says: "I'm better than they think" which wrongly insinuates they are judging me; I give up my cowardice/ fear of being hurt again...after all it isn't the end of the world being hurt when I handle it in a healthy way; Lord Jesus I also admit to the hurt I inflicted to my identity when I lazily failed the second grade, along with me punishing myself for causing the rejection by my peers in grade school. I forgive myself with your help Jesus, and I receive your forgiveness and healing in this area of my life intellectually and emotionally. Lord God I ask that you replace my intolerance with kindness, warmth, and caring humility. Thank you for being here for me, constantly non-judgmental. You inspire me to love people, for you are beautiful to me. Amen.

§ 9.11: EXPLAINING & HEALING GREED/ SELFISHNESS:

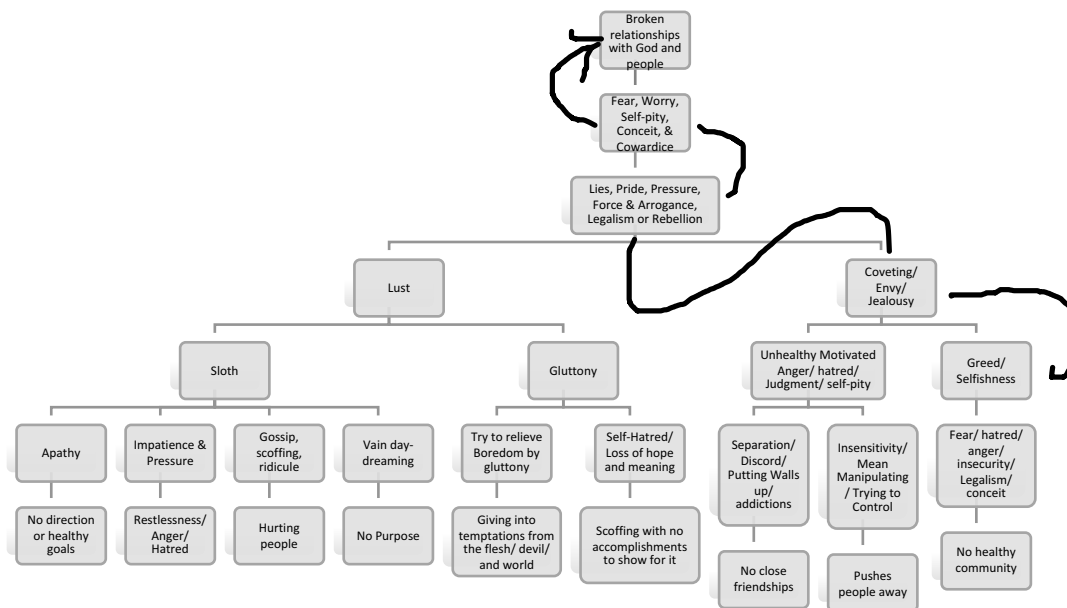
The belief that one should come first (i.e. having jealousy/ envy) translates into doing everything

to be first (i.e. having selfishness/ greed).

Pride leads to greed for two reasons. Pride must have more possessions than others do to feel good about itself. And because fear/ self-pity motivates pride one never has enough because un-dealt with fear/ self-pity is always there, and therefore greed and selfishness live on. When I seem to observe being left out of something, the inclination is to feel jealous, angry, and to judge, but owning the hurt through confession and repentance in prayer so that I know how and why I feel the way I do so I can renew my mind in a non-judgmental way is the wise path to take. This way I am able to process my current values, commitments, and thinking behind it all, and therefore am able to navigate and transition from judging to truth telling by renewing my mind with "I"-statements.

Example: Dealing with Jealousy and Selfishness:

The following progression is a structure that grew within my personal “tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me:



With these specifics:

I had:

- 1) **Self-pity:** I'm in danger of losing what I have, or I see myself as too poor and needy.
- 2) **Fear:** I believed the lie that I don't have someone to look after my welfare.
- 3) **Pride:** I have a confused sense of my own self-value and ability.
- 4) **Pride:** I must look after my own well being at all costs through my own energies and resources because no one else will including God in my opinion.
- 5) **False Belief:** If I don't get the desired “good” I won't be happy anymore. Which is:
- 6) **Jealousy:** I must have what others have and feel sad because I covet what I don't have. That led to:

- 7) **Selfishness:** Placing my concerns above others. That led to:
- 8) **Bad behavior:** Me setting out to get what I believed I'm entitled to through moral or immoral ways.

Processing It Healthily:

The best way to process stuff like this is to:

- 1) Choose to humble myself, and to no longer pretend, but to navigate by truth
- 2) Connect to what is in my heart and with God (don't push the bad-stuff down)
- 3) Understand the connections in my personal tree
- 4) Confess my sins (receiving forgiveness through God's touch of peace)
- 5) Repent in prayer from each part of the above progression from the bottom upwards, and deal with all my fears and self-pity, and in the process:
- 6) Renew my mind in part with "I"-statements,
- 7) Ask God in faith for the gift of generosity to replace my stinginess,
- 8) Realize that a God is the ultimate lover, caregiver, and giver of peace and when I get in touch with my gratitude whose source is God. Coveting is meaningless in God's presence because when I have God, I have everything
- 9) Submit to God and resist the devil out of grace and truth
- 10) Obey the Golden Rule as its truth helps to stabilize me with grace and gives me a healthy. direction.

As far as correct thinking is concerned, aiming for altruism, and being generous to others like God relates with us, is key, i.e. "Love like we have been loved by Jesus" is as high as we can aim for and is a positive way to replace the negative commands of "do not covet" or the mentality of only seeking fairness and trying to protect my entitlements and rights.

When the stronghold of greed/ selfishness is broken our freedom still needs to be maintained through grace and truth via wisdom, prayer, connecting with God, submission to God, and faith in Jesus to position ourselves so God can save us from ourselves. Feelings of anger or jealousy ought not be repressed in prayer to God, instead they need to be owned, and not fleshly wrestled with or wholly focused on as right or fitting. We need to commit to generous giving to those in need out of the peace Jesus gives; then deal with coveting/ envy/ jealousy, and then deal with pride and fear/ self-pity/ and anger which will bring freedom from greed. People who focus on or live by their feelings alone will be slaves to those feelings. If one wants to completely conquer unwanted feelings (attitudes), one needs to change one's thoughts and beliefs through the grace and truth of Jesus Christ; we do this through confession and repentance in prayer, renewing our minds, and aiming to live out Jesus' commands with His help.

When self-pity/ anger (resentment) and selfishness go untouched (not healed), then it will warp one's attitudes, intuitions, perspectives, and relationships. This quest for healing, and making room for healthy attitudes, desires, and thinking can be a real fight and a work of labor through

prayer³². To work out our salvation in fear and trembling means to clean our insides so our relational outsides are clean too like Jesus instructed. Praying through blockages and receiving the promises of God over our lives and resisting the devil's attempts to cause confusion and immobilization is key. We should deal with those areas that confuse us and those that seemingly have no obvious solution. There are ways through challenges and out of them (maybe not pleasant ways, but noble ones). Let's think without the box. Let's reason together with God, and He will anoint our thinking when we seek Him with all our hearts. Knowing His voice is key to breakthroughs!

Irritability can be fueled by the "sin nature", and can lead to judging, self-pity, and using force and manipulation to get one's way. I have found that confessing this, and speaking to the "sin nature"- attitudes by saying: "I accept you, but I don't need you right now, and pray, "I give this up with your help Jesus through faith" and to invite Jesus into my space by His Holy Spirit asking Him to overcome sin makes me more tolerant, kind, and peaceful.

When I get free in this or any area, then I need to move back to focusing on what Jesus is saying to me next, and continue to let Him save me through my trust in Him. Principles and truths have their limitations, only the Devine Principle: Jesus, is more than enough. I choose to follow Him alone.

³² As far as my struggle to know what healthy love and humility look like cf. my books called: *Exploring Faith, Hope, and Love*, and *Exploring Humility and Pride*

10 SUMMARIZING HOW I DISMANTLE THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN MY LIFE

Working the connections between the tree's building blocks above by just analyzing stuff (without prayer and God) can lead to burdens, weights, emptiness, and a lack of grace to change. In becoming aware of the connections from "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within, it is best to look at my bad fruit and ask what fear(s), anger and possible self-pity motivates and grows them, and also to ask the Holy Spirit what lies motivate or keep the tree structure together and intact through my fears. Once the connections are understood and hit home it is time to dismantle them through strategic prayer that allows for the process of renewing my mind to start in new problem areas. This involves confessing my sins/ bad attitudes/ bad energy/ fears/ and resentments, and repenting in prayer from them by working upwards through the tree diagram. This keeps the guessing and frustration to a minimum, and helps me to find and dismantle the real motivations/ roots/ powers in my sin strongholds more quickly, and so I eventually find freedom to love more deeply.

When confusion, and fleshly energy operate in the present I know that past or present hurts or judgments are not fully dealt with. It's usually where one's hurts and wounds currently are or did occur...where the devil promises stuff that seem justified to us at the time; however, his promises are always empty, robbing people of their true humanity and identity. Intense fear and confusion go together and can cloud one's judgments and lead to thinking one is saving one's life by holding onto the power and promises from the dark side. The devil promises power and tries to justify our sense of injustice or unfairness to win us over to permanent resentments trying to kill the gentle and soft love planted in our hearts. This needs to be prayed through thoroughly for healing and freedom to flourish and thrive.

The growth of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" works in such a manner that creates distance between us and God. We begin to doubt, question, and disbelieve God's promise to be with us, care for us, and His intentions to bless us. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they did not know God's forgiveness, and started to blame whomever or whatever was convenient because they felt lost, and they had fears to deal with. "The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" came between them and God, just like it does with us and God. When we are forgiven, then we have peace with God, and His peace rests in our hearts. The devils do everything they can to plant lies in our minds to rob us of this peace. When dealing with broken relationships, forgiveness helps to mend our hurts and jettison our burdens.

When using anger and self-pity to get one's way we are saying no to loving others because everything is geared to selfishness in this context. Deciding to choose love and altruism in the place of anger and self-pity are the keys to softening the heart, creating warmth and no longer

being the center of one's own universe.

Living a superficial life where there are no roots, no enduring values, and no commitments to caring for people is a result of fear, conceit, and self-pity. The fear comes because there is little trust, with no real knowledge of genuine love, no understanding that many people do care, and no motivation for living for a higher purpose greater than puppy-love. When stuff is revealed below the surface, embarrassment, fear of rejection, denial, and donning masks become the order of the day.

Sometimes praying to uproot pride seemingly does not work because the spiritual malady does have other roots that must be dealt with too. For instance, I realized that often a wall came up in me pushing others away when the healthy thing to do was to care, feel other people's pains, frustrations and struggles. Pride was involved but it wasn't the mother-load in this context and confessing only pride didn't heal the wound of insensitivity. However, confessing as wrong and repenting in prayer from the insensitivity, unwillingness to trust, to not care, to not feel for people, and having an arrogant attitude, giving up my "me vs. them" – mentality, and then asking God for forgiveness and healing and receiving them in faith through grace did help. Then choosing to care for people out of the "peace" God puts into my heart to willingly dispense grace as far as the Golden Rule is concerned helps to break the walls I have erected (to vainly protect me against rejection). Grace is never stagnant. It flows into me and out of me when I relate healthily.

Sometimes we think we have exhausted praying about the vices in "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" and still feel stuck. I have found it has to do with nine-things:

- 1) Not accepting God's will for one's life (i.e. not accepting that people are perfectly imperfect, and shit happens).
- 2) Ignoring real or false guilt.
- 3) Caring more about one's knowledge of spiritual things than "actually" caring about and loving people practically.
- 4) Not submitting to God and resisting the devil.
- 5) Not having processed uncomfortable stuff and not using "I"-statements to renew the mind.
- 6) Blaming attacking or judging God and people and pursuing angry pressure and self-pity as means to getting what one wants.
- 7) Not going deeper into the healing process with Jesus' help.
- 8) Not living in the present by embracing and celebrating God's grace.
- 9) Praying in faith but ending with unbelief in the same prayer (i.e. being double minded).

Having certain feelings doesn't always mean our thinking is justified, natural, and healthy because those feelings resonate with us. Thoughts determine feelings. We reject wrong

negative hard feelings by rejecting wrong negative hard beliefs and thinking and replacing them with caring, loving and truthful thoughts and beliefs. It does not normally work the other way around. However, we can have negative attitudes that are so sour, bitter, and judgmental that just spout out of our hearts unwanted. This needs to be prayed through with accurate, gentle, genuine, honest, strategic prayers when we have enough clarity of mind so we can sort through our confusion and emotions, and when the memories are fresh enough. When we are renewing our minds, we will encounter plenty of confusion³³ because we might be torn between our old beliefs/ thinking and the light of Jesus in our consciences, so we need to be patient and persistent and hold onto Jesus' grace and truth (promises, presence, teachings, and example) asking Him for direction and believing He will provide.

Prayer is so important to maintaining a close relationship with God, along with replacing an unhealthy view of God with a merciful, caring, kind, loving view/ experience of God. Challenging sour attitudes towards God can be done by seeing (and reading about) Jesus in the Gospels and realizing He looks exactly like God the Father. The gentle words of Jesus inspire us to turn away from our angry sour attitudes and beliefs as we trust His forgiveness, grace, truth, compassion, wisdom, plans, actions, and invitations.

There are many good books on how to cultivate healthy two-way-prayer such as by Brad Jersak, and Mark Virkler. They can help to clear up our confusion or how to walk through confusion into the light and have more inward clarity. Prayer is not just about petitions, but about communion, hearing each other, and touching each other

³³ I have written about stuff that confused me in the books: *Exploring Faith, Hope, and Love* and *Exploring Humility and Pride*

11 APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY LEARNED TO SOME EXAMPLES IN MY PERSONAL LIFE

As one realizes by now, each person's personal "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" is different and depends on the situations encountered and the resulting decisions, loyalties, foolishness, bad commitments made, and lies believed.

I will share five examples on how God helped me to dismantle some the strongholds found in my personal "tree of knowledge of good and evil" within. I believe that the techniques, methods, and strategies found in this book can help people who struggle with twisted stuff like was found in my heart. Maybe even stuff not talked about in this book, but spoken about in the Bible too.

The strategy is simple: when I am aware of weakness or compulsive sins in my life, I find my way through the parts of "the tree of Knowledge of good and evil" diagram that speak most clearly to my situation and history and begin to speak to God about the connections asking God to give me awareness and insight to flesh out the connections in my personal sin-life. By writing down my prayer conversation, the lies I believed, and working through the issues in prayer with God until the structure is permanently dismantled as per the methodology found in this book. Often there are multiple roots per stronghold, so praying things from different angles as the Holy Spirit leads, searching (not just waiting around), asking, knocking on doors, and not giving up will eventually bring the truth and grace that open up freedom.

Dealing with one's fears and broken relationships are usually the final steps to healing and that means dealing with the lies, and resentments I believe or hold onto.

§ 11.1: Tackling Insensitivity:

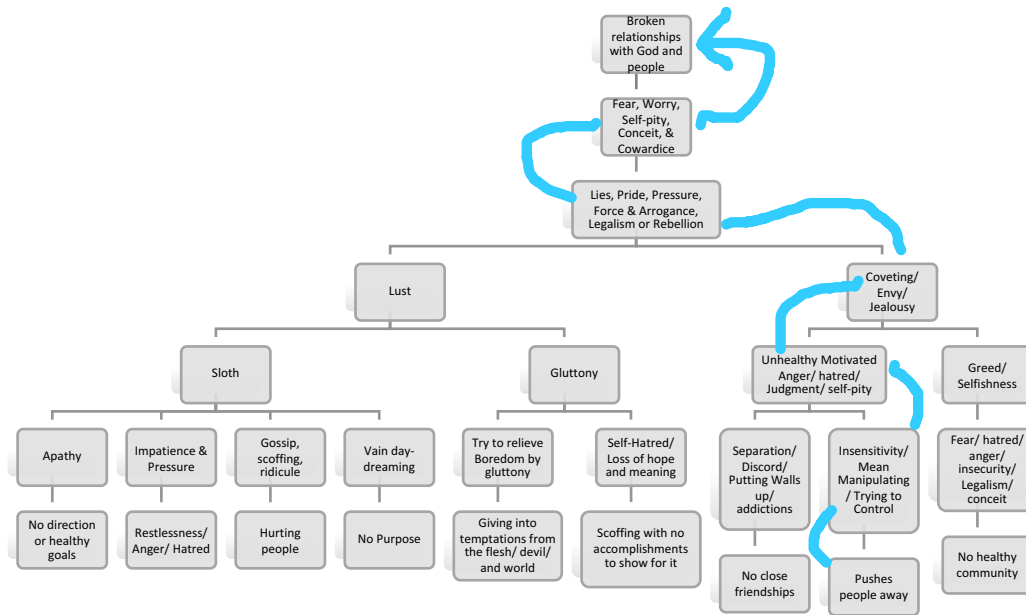
The situation:

I'm "really" hard on others. That means I'm insensitive, impatient, and mean when I have fears that what I covet won't come my way. Most of the time I'm "really" a kind person, but when I "really" want something badly, then my fear, pride, and selfishness trigger my war chest of meanness and being hard on others so that I will somehow get my way. Fact is, I'm hard on others because I'm hard on myself in this context but not in all contexts. The fruit of this is that I land up acting like a jerk doing all this ugly stuff and land up pushing people away.

So how do I deal with it so it doesn't reoccur anymore and so I become more gentle and patient?

Following the arrowed blue-line in the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" diagram below, I will show how I prayed through in the different contexts of this particular-relational situational

disease.



Get my bearing:

First off, I need to find my bearing. I do so by asking God for wisdom, and asking the Holy Spirit for healing. Then to start processing the situation by recounting the emotions (conflicting or not), facts, details, visual, memories relating to the baggage or struggles I have. Then I choose to talk with God about it confessing the details, conflicts, confusion, difficulty, sins, and bad attitudes I have related to the area I'm dealing with, and I choose to do so in a caring mindset where there is clean energy, humility, or some purity somewhere in my heart/ mind from where to pray from so that I eventually get to a place of not attacking or judging God and others.

Then I begin to pray:

Lord God, I admit and confess that I am hard on people as far as my attitudes go within me. I have a black, dark, mean energy within when things don't go my way. I know all this blackness is found in my war/ tool chest to get my way in the worst, ugly, and most jerk-like fashion possible.

Lord Jesus, I have depended on this war chest in the cavity of my heart as my energy in getting people to comply with my wishes even though I hide this darkness really well most of the time. It is self-pitying, and angrily geared to get my way. I accept it [that the self-pity and angry pressure used to have a prominent place in my heart] but I don't need it right now. I choose to welcome the Holy Spirit in my heart instead, and to submit to Him, and resist the devil.

I admit that I judge people impatiently who are in my way out of this energy. I give up saying "No" to it with your help, and instead I choose to give up with your help my judging and using manipulation and force to get my way.

I confess that I covet stuff jealousy instead of being generous. I give up saying “No” to it with your help Jesus, and instead I give up coveting for myself alone what ought to be shared with others in warm and good-natured ways.

I confess that I have plenty of pride, that I see myself as the center of the whole universe. I give up saying “No” to agreeing with this compulsive-energy, and instead I choose to give it up with your help through faith Jesus.

Lord Jesus, I give up my fears of going without, and of being second. I give up these fears as you O God provide generously for me and others so I don’t have to worry. I give up worrying about things I can’t and shouldn’t try to control. I choose to be wiser on how I set my heart on things so I don’t give power to others with me being out of control.

Renewing the mind:

Lord I felt self-pity, went into insane anger, bitterness, hatred, and meanness after I felt the wound of rejection as a child in school, and I focused a lot of that energy on myself, and it hurts to this day; I still feel the consequences...Lord God I went into a rebellious mode, a conformity mode, and a legalistic mode fused together in a horrible mess...all out of fear...fears of missing out...I give up that fear now with your grace Jesus; I give up the mixture of rebellion, conformity, and legalism within me because they are empty cisterns...since you are with me Jesus...walking with me...wanting my healing...being my peace...my salvation...my life...joy...and consolation.

So, that is a stronghold: “fears of missing out on the goods”. Goods of having happiness, being first, having instant peace or gratification, having the easy way, being on the inside, having loyalty, being in covenant, having solidarity, and unending friendship bliss...but with fear and demanding motivating it all out of my pride with all the wrong ways to attain these things.

Either I'm very good at lying to myself...or I'm very foolish for believing the devil's lies in this context. Satan, I reject your lies: the BIG one that I'll miss out on the goods unless I act out of my “sin nature”! I accept you [my sin nature] for what you are, but I don't need you right now”, and I pray, “I give this up with your help Jesus through faith”. Because Jesus is sufficient with grace upon grace! AMEN!

This led to the following two-truths that liberated me a little while later:

- 1) How does one stand up and ask for something? With flexibility...not rigidly, darkly, ugly, demandingly, have to have it, and no compromise energy. Humility allows people a choice in the matter...gives people a say...empowers people...not giving them the impression that they absolutely got to come through! This frees them and me to laugh and love in freedom instead of compulsively demanding stuff for selfish reasons.

- 2) Become able to accept the healthy “No’s!” from all people. This helps to kill my use of self-pity and anger to get my way, and helps me start to respecting and loving people instead.

Next, I prayed to give up the strongholds of inflexibility and refusing to accept “No” in my requests.

But all this does not go far enough. I needed to give up my judgment of my peers and myself for allowing the hurt to be inflicted on me in grade school. Lord God, I give up my judgment against my peers, and I forgive myself now with your help, grace, and truth, I choose to love them and myself from now on with your grace and truth. Thank you, Jesus for forgiving me my resentments, hatred, and meanness directed towards all the people I wanted stuff from but did not respect well enough.

There that is how I prayed one portion of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me to bring healing. Notice it deals with my history, the wound, understanding the lies I believed, and finally telling Satan I reject his lie(s) and repenting in prayer from it all asserting that Jesus is generous and sufficient in providing all the peace I need (because He is always with me). I also needed to forgive.

We can be hard on ourselves in one context, and soft on ourselves in other contexts. The above example deals with the former, the next one deals with latter.

§ 11.2: Tackling Pride:

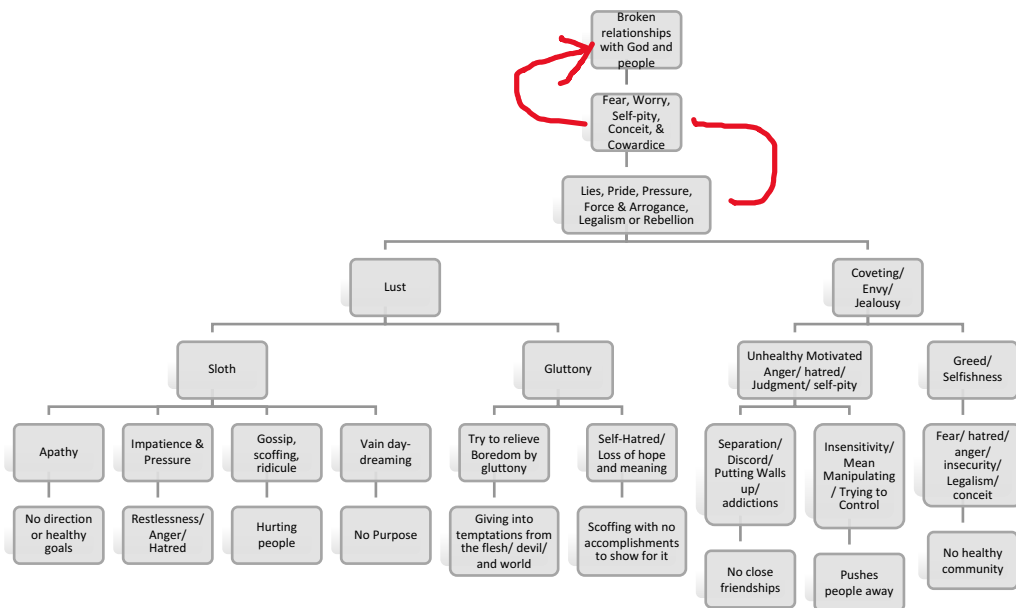
To work the tree diagram, one does not have to start right at the bottom. Often, we can be stuck in a certain part of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within, and bear obsessive and compulsive fruit there too, as in this example:

The situation:

Next, I realized that when I judged people, I did so in a way where I was much harder on them than I was on myself. This part of the tree had much malice formed out of pride mixed with blindness.

Getting One’s Bearings:

Below is “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” diagram, and to pray it I follow the red-arrow-lines:



Then I Begin to Pray:

Lord Jesus, I admit that I have loads of pride in this context. It is lethal. I “actually” want my pound of “flesh” from these people for what they have done, and in my pride, I have judged myself to be better than them just like in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. I give this up with your help through faith in you Lord Jesus, and I choose to celebrate life, love, and tolerance in my relationships instead. I admit that I have seen people as worthy of my wrath, revenge, and rejection not realizing I'm no better than anyone else either.

So, Lord God, what fears are behind this?

I fear not getting what I think I am owed, deserve, or have a claim to. I fear because I have chosen to not trust people. I have a history of being skeptical of the goodness belonging to other people.

Lord God, I give up this fear here and now, please help me to see the goodness in other people, and to seek to appeal to their nobility and not to what I see as their guilt and shame that I try to use pressure and force on when I'm desiring something from them. Thank you, Jesus.

I admit that behind this fear is where I expect rejection. I have been rejected so often and never processed any of it all in healthy ways, and I choose to here and now to forgive those people who have hurt me through rejection during my life time.

I admit, that because I feel powerless in this context that I default to an attitude of self-pity, anger, and despair. I confess this as wrong, and give up my self-pity and anger as tools to get what I want and I choose instead to love the people who help to trigger my war chest in this context.

Lord God, I thirst for your Holy Spirit. I hunger for your presence, and I rest in your love. Please help me to renew my mind with your truth in the next while so that I will know how good and pleasing your will really is. I submit to your will, and I renounce the devil and all his empty promises and lies. Jesus, you are sufficient with grace and truth because you never run from a fight, are my constant companion, my real peace, and are my consolation. Amen!

Going Deeper:

Lord God, I confess my pride in the forms of: I always think I know better than others (because they are stupid and not me), I am most important and others must come last at all costs, and no one is going to pull one over on me. I am sorry and ask for your forgiveness and healing receiving them deeply within me. Thank you Jesus.

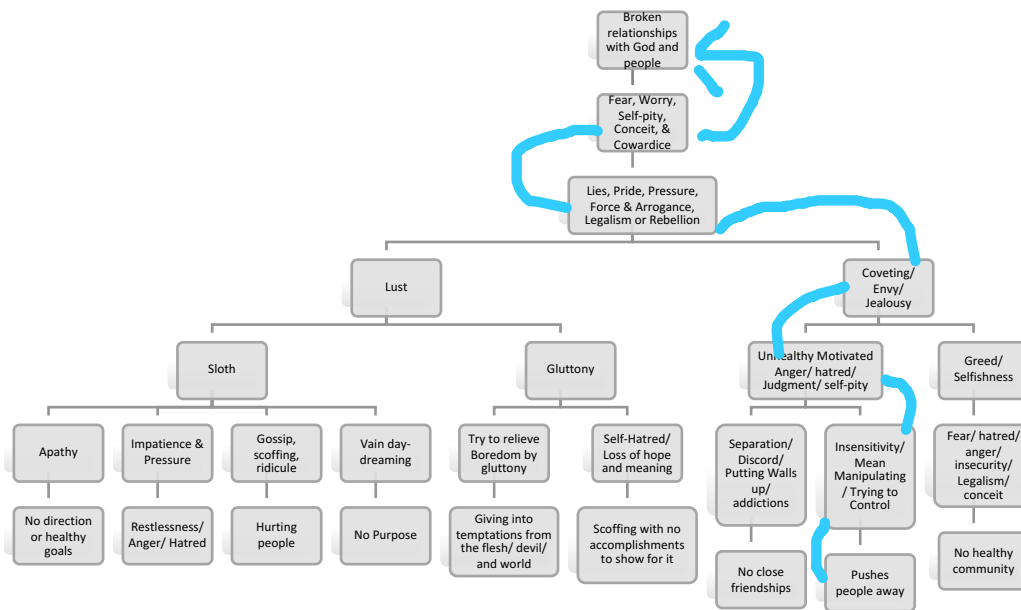
Dear God I give up saying “No” to my pride recorded above, and instead I change my mind and give up in faith with your help the sinful attitude of thinking I’m most important, I must not come last, and I’m not gullible, with corresponding beliefs that others need to come last, but I must be first, and expecting others to foremost live according to my values, expectations, and morality. I give up all thoughts, speech and behaviors that I used in the past up to the present that matched these patterns. Please help me to renew my mind and heart and behaviors in this area. Thanks

Lord Jesus I give up saying “No!” self-righteously to the sin of cowardice of choosing to play it safe, and to not take chances; I give these up with your help instead. I give up the lies that if there is not enough for everyone then I need to do everything in my power morally or immorally to get what is mine. Lord God, I confess my fears: of not getting what others may get or have, that I will not have or will lose friends, and of being left behind when events take place. Lord God I give up these fears, and sins with your help, and I choose to renew my mind with commonsense truths along with your truth O God. Please help me to practice humility instead of my pride Lord God. Lord you deserve all the glory, because you are the source of all good things...thank you for making us conduits of your grace. Thank you and Amen!

§ 11.3: Tackling the Tendency to Push People Away:

The Situation:

The situation is the same as the last example. Often when the hurt goes “really” deep we need to go deeper still, since there are multiple layers that need to be dealt with from various angles. I deal with more layers in this example.



Praying:

- 1) Lord God, I'm sorry for pushing people away, and refusing to connect with them in caring ways. I commit to giving this up, through faith in you Lord Jesus, and caring for people instead from now on with your grace and truth.
- 2) Lord God, I admit that a wall of insensitivity rises within me that shows fleshly energy when my fear-induced-broken-moral compass sees violations of any rule or Law. Lord Jesus, I choose to lower this wall, and recalibrate my expectations, and renew my compass with your truth, light, and healing. Mercy triumphs over justice, retribution, and revenge. Kindness leads to change; not meanness.
- 3) I have done so and do judge the people involved as convenient scape-goats, I search for goodness within but my hands draw up mostly mean judgments and condemnation, hatred, malice and a desire to hurt certain people. I give up in faith, with your help Lord Jesus, condemning the people made in your image, I give up through faith in you Jesus, hurting people because of my hurt. I choose the love and forgiveness that comes from you the source of all goodness Lord God. Your word says don't pay back evil with evil. I give this up with your help through faith in you O Jesus.
- 4) I did so because I envied the strong, and have committed to being seen as strong no matter what. I give this up now through faith in you Lord Jesus, choosing to be despised, rejected, hated, and uncared for so long as I'm living in your will, loving you the Living God, and my neighbor as myself.
- 5) Lord God, I have legalistically conformed to the "supposed" thinking and actions of those who rejected me as a child. They seemed strong, in control, in the zone, were popular, and seemed healthier than those they ridiculed, hurt, hated, and judged. And I wrongly wanted what they had and was willing to pay the price to belong. I give this up right now in faith, with your help Lord Jesus, based on the blood and work that you shed on the cross for each of us. Thank you.

- 6) Lord God I admit I have done all of this out of being hurt, and out of the fear of being hurt again. I give up this fear through faith in you the living God, and ask in faith that you heal me Lord Jesus from this broken structure within. Therefore, I forgive them from my heart, choosing to love the weak and the strong as you do Jesus.
- 7) I invite you Holy Trinity into my life more fully, and choose to live out the Golden Rule, lowering my walls and loving those I'm called to care about. I pray all of this in Jesus' name. Thank you for forgiving me Father God. Thank you for not leaving me to my own devices by pouring your grace into my heart and life. Amen.
- 8) Lord God, please help me to renew my mind with your truth relationally, and inwardly. I await your truth, seek your will, and resist the devil, and reject his lies and empty promises. I pray so in Jesus' Name. Amen!

Renewing My Mind:

Lord God in the past I tried to avoid hurt, by pretending, putting up walls, and trying to join the proud and strong. But it did not work. In trying to save my life I lost it along with the rich communion you offer along with that of my fellow man. I now choose to embrace hurt because truth, love, justice, honor, respect, and caring for people are the healthier goals. Because when I am weak (in the world's eyes), then I am strong (in God's eyes), and your grace is sufficient Lord Jesus. Lord God, I ask for the gift of courage to replace my cowardice, conceit, and pride. Thank you. Amen!

Summary:

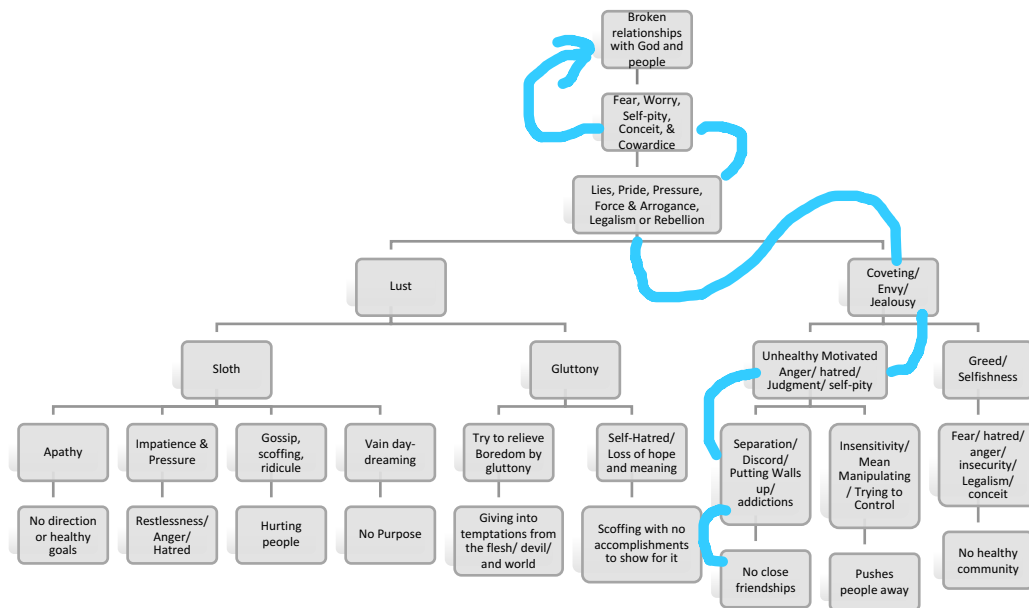
It is important to not copy idea for idea, or request after request made in the above prayers when praying your own prayers, but to leave room for one's own uniqueness, personality, story, and history, room for the leading of the Holy Spirit, and making the effort to dig in your own heart and mind for your own truth to get your bearings so you can follow Jesus into the light. When we undertake to humble ourselves before God, He grants His empowering presence and the desired freedom eventually comes.

§ 11.4: Dealing with Deception and an Unwanted Smile:

Situation:

Imagine taking a risk, and losing the gamble like I did in grade school when I lied to try and be accepted by my peers, but got rejected. And then having my unhealthy reactions and consequences wreak havoc on my spiritual life for 43+years. I've prayed into this area somewhat, but there is still that wound. So, going deeper is what is needed.

The tree:



Prayer:

Lord God, I confess that I hurt so much, and that I set the walls that went up, and put the masks on, that I could not let others get close to me because of them, as fear of being hurt keeps them there. I said “No” to ever being hurt again, but I give this up with your help Jesus, and choose to navigate my relations without guarantees that I won’t be hurt again, because I can do all things through you Jesus Christ who strengthens me!

I admit I became black inside, hollow, cold, dark and starved for love. I give this up in faith with your help Lord Jesus, and invite your warmth, presence, and Lordship into the dark rooms of my heart. You are most welcome Holy trinity.

I give up in faith with your help Jesus my judgments, hatred, angry pressure directed at myself and my enemies. Please heal my heart Jesus! Thank you so much for your promises, truth, and healing.

Lord I confess that I have been jealous of my peers’ friendships, relationships, and seeming blissful happiness that I wanted, but did not have because of my inner walls of protection. I give up saying “No” to my jealousy with your help Jesus, and instead give up this jealousy with your help Jesus through faith! Thanks!

I put so much pressure on myself to belong, to have the perfect self-image, to be strong, to hide my broken heart and none of these gave me what I wanted: connection, belonging, peace, hope, and happiness! Lord, I give up putting this pressure on myself with your help, and embrace your breath of life, grace, hope, truth, and presence from now on! I give up with your help the fear of being hurt again, and embrace your wisdom, heart, and care for me instead.

Thanks!

Lord, I forgive myself for my pride, independence and foolishness in this matter. I give up my judgments against my peers! They are who they are, no more judgment from me! Amen!

Revelation:

I can't save myself through deception. I can't save myself through lies, through my own energy, through my pride, motivated by fears, and leaving my hurts unhealed. I give up, with your help Lord Jesus, my self-righteous attempts, proud struggles, fleshly energy, and rigid commitments to save myself by wearing a mask, that only ever landed up with me hurting people in my attempt to not be hurt. I pray all this admitting my guilt and intellectually and emotionally receive your forgiveness and healing. Amen! The mask is coming off slowly as I process in prayer all the situations where I wore it as my protection or salvation. Jesus, you are my real Salvation.

Revelation:

Wearing a mask is a necessity when there is fear, unless one knows and experiences caring, gentleness, deep unconditional love. So, if I don't want a mask, then I must give up the fear and embrace the Love that can't be shaken: God. But how do I do this? I confront my history of fears inspired by being hurt so badly in some cases, and I confront the false beliefs behind them, so they lose their power.

Confronting My Fears:

There are four categories of fears: rejection, abandonment, confrontation, and death. As stated previously, one needs to process and confront them by attacking the beliefs behind them in prayer with humble truth preferably by writing them out and then speaking them out loud. We simply list the fears, give them up in faith, and affirm good old commonsense wisdom and biblical truth and promises about love that come our way through prayer and relationship with God. In doing this we will become less fear-motivated and more love-motivated. Everyone will have their own lists. Here are a few of mine:

I fear being without a mask. Lord Jesus, I know that the mask is an idol, that keeps me from real, wholesome, warm, caring, and loving salvation. To give it up completely I need to redirect and give my fear to you, as your perfect love casts out all fear. I do this now asking you to fill me with your love.

They saw through me and that put fear into me. Lord Jesus, I give up with your help this fear of being seen through when I'm trying to hide stuff. I'm a poor actor, and even worse liar. We all have a "sin nature"; and your grace Jesus is more than sufficient.

I fear people. Lord Jesus, I give up with your help through faith my fear of people. I choose to be courageous instead through your Spirit Almighty God in me.

I fear those close to me. Lord Jesus, I give up with your help through faith, my fears of honesty, intimacy, and vulnerability in my relating style. I choose instead to be honest, not anal, but caring, fun, humorous, and playful with your help Loving God. Amen!

I fear being hurt. Lord God, hurt is a part of life, I accept with your help through faith, that I will be hurt at times, but I choose to navigate that hurt with your love, with your caring, with your example Lord Jesus. Nothing is impossible for you the Living God.

I fear screwing up. Perfect love casts out all fear. I walk by faith, not sight, I accept and expect to screw up every now and then, but I choose to handle it with your grace Lord Jesus. I'm perfectly imperfect. I choose through faith in you Lord Jesus to give up my fear of screwing up. Fear does not save, love saves. Fear is negative; whereas faith, love and hope are positive.

I fear being found out again. Lord God, here I am, you know everything about me...you who are most powerful choose to care for me, and love me anyways...so what can man do against me when you are for me.

Revelation a Few Weeks Later:

For so long I have seen reality through the lens of "us vs. them" and these past two-weeks that lens God has kindly removed. Last night at Bible Study I clued in that reality isn't "(us=good) vs. (them=bad)" which was my subconscious belief that kept me from loving others more fully and helped to keep the walls coming up all the time. My friend Mark's sermon that I read triggered the need to examine this topic. God is love, and if anything, the only "us vs. them" there could be is God against us all, but His love has bridged the gap. Thank you, Lord God. There is "us and them", but not "us vs. them". People are not our enemies, but the devil is. The "us=better vs. them=worse" can be beneath one's radar in one's subconscious and even imbedded in our closest relationships. Each instance needs to be uncovered, confessed, and repented from in prayer for it to lose its power. Another attitude of "us=intelligent vs. them=stupid" can also be in play. Blanket type prayers won't budge this. I needed to get specific and deal with wherever it grew, for freedom to love to grow in its place.

The way of peace is to war against evil within people; not war against the people themselves, and our weapon is to love people more deeply and powerfully through God's grace than self-righteously by ourselves. This coincides with the following dream God gave me awhile back:

A Dream:

I dreamt that I had this old worn out clutch pencil like I used to use in university that I tried to make functional with tape. As I did this I was offered a brand-new pen to write with, but I rejected it because I thought I knew what I was doing. Near the end of the Dream I was told that the "free West was at war with the Communists", but I smugly told myself it was easily won and I could handle it myself.

Unraveling the Meaning of the Dream:

I have since prayed into this night vision recognizing that God was offering me something new, yet I was quick to reject it within the dream, but while awake I decided to actively pursue the new pen and to sort out the meaning of the war talked about in the dream.

The broken pencil could symbolize that my old-tree-life has been broken, and that I needed to give it up completely; and instead of refusing the new pen, which is the new life; I need to embrace the pen. This is what God was inviting me to. It could also mean that this book will help many people who have struggled with the same sin stronghold issues I have. This book was a psychotic mess many revisions into writing it, but after the dream life started to enter into the project.

The talk about the “free West vs. Communism” I'd later realize was an “us vs. them” or “me vs. them”- mentality that I tenaciously held onto for decades and that stopped people from getting close to me, with me not connecting with them deeply, and keeping me from deeply loving the people in my life. I was either loyal to, or an enemy, to certain packages, labels, camps, sects, denominations, traditions, and types; and I had difficulty whole-heartedly affirming the good in people with the wrong designation no matter how much I wanted to love and connect with them. I was prevented from fully loving because of this mentality. I therefore chose to focus my prayer life in this area by giving up this “me or us’ vs. them”-mentality and I found such peace enter into my life along with the ability to connect with and not habitually judge people like I did before. I felt connected within for the first time in many decades. The walls came down too.

Thank you, Jesus, for the dream. I now understand that you see all things, and you are kind, caring, and gracious to all.

Two More Layered Revelations:

- 1) I also realized that I've been embarrassed about my own positions on a wide variety of topics because I believed I might be rejected in voicing my beliefs, opinions, convictions, and desires and as a result I therefore smiled so hugely when confronted, as my way to cope with my embarrassment.
- 2) I realized that I wanted to control people's opinions of myself every step of the way. This is an impossible path. Because I couldn't, I was embarrassed and smiled a ridiculously insane smile because I was out of control. Giving up this foolish expectation in prayer by replacing it with humble commonsense truth helped to further set me free from my conceit.

A Crowning Revelation:

Because I let go of my “us vs. them”- mentality, my insecurity and fear that God might somehow love some people more than others was dealt a death blow. I knew that if God somehow loved some people more than others then I could not love Him out of my jealousy. But then I realized

that God is perfect love, and if He loved someone less than He could, then there would be room for improvement. But God needs no improvement. So, He loves me and everyone no less than any other. This realization brought back my joy of God's salvation, and lifted me up in my ability to love more deeply.

More Prayer Required:

Sane people want to love everyone deeply. But when there is a history of war, conflict, suspicion, and accusations coming from both sides in an "us vs. them" relationship, then how does one dismantle "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" in the face of one's enemies?

Confession:

Holy Spirit, I confess that I have had a hateful, unkind, suspicious, resentful, angry attitude towards Moslem people. I choose, now, with your guidance, help, leading, care, example, truth, and care to go deeper in getting rid of my hypocrisy, spiritual pride, hatred, and "us vs. them"-mentality when it comes to my relationship with Moslem people. They are not the problem; my sins are. I confess these heart maladies, sins, along with fears rooted in suspicions as wrong and ask for your forgiveness and healing. Based on First John 1:9, I claim the promise of forgiveness and healing you offer for my guilt and sin. Thank you!

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, I give up with your help in faith my judging, anger, and fear towards Moslem people. I admit that my "us vs. them"-mentality is a foundational block to my unfriendly attitudes towards these people. I give this up now in faith, with your help Lord Jesus. I choose to renew my mind with the following humbling truths:

A Christian:

Is a sinner with faith; a lover who sins

Is imperfect!

Is just as susceptible to the seduction of power (war), sex (manipulation), and money (oil) as anyone else.

Have caused as many wars, injustices as any other religion or culture group in history.

Has as many misguided loyalties as anyone else.

Where there is hatred, I plant love; where there is suspicion, I choose to see the humanity, believe the best, and care for all Moslem people everywhere. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for bringing your love into my life. In Jesus Name, amen!

More Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, I confess that when my peers rejected me in grade school, my pride, identity, and dignity were under attack, and therefore my conceit grew and surged within me in an attempt to save my identity: what I wrongly saw as me being a good person that was second to none, especially when it came to those who rejected me. The hurt of rejection, motivated vows on my part to not trust anyone, to see the world in a "me vs. them"- mentality that atrophied my love, grew my pride, all laid on a foundation of black fear.

I choose to see my peers from back then with love, tolerance, care, dignity, and peace instead of as enemies worthy of my war cry. I do this with your help Holy Spirit. They are who they are! I forgive them for their part, I forgive myself, and I withdraw my judgment and attack against God in the matter.

Lord Jesus I give up in faith with your help my fear of being vulnerable, fear of loss of meaning, fear of being rejected again, and fear of being hurt all over again. I choose courage, light, love, and caring in place of all this negative, dark stagnancy in my life. I put my full trust, life, and hope into your hands Lord God, and choose to hold onto your promises to forgive me, and heal me. Thank you, Holy Trinity.

Another Step:

When hurts, and dark energy (or malice) go deep, they will trigger stuff in related areas regularly. I have found that praying thoroughly for what got triggered along with praying so that hurts get healed (i.e. forgiving those who hurt me, forgiving myself, and giving up judgments and attacks towards God; not over done or under done, because God grants His grace to the humble) in the manners outlined in this book do restore me to sanity and in the process, dismantle the tree of knowledge of good and evil within me.

Another Revelation:

I realized a few weeks later, that there was malice within me. I realized that I was not geared to return good for evil, but evil for evil. In fact, I was geared to be mean, angry, petty, anal, and hateful towards those who threatened my security, my treasure, and my happiness. I have confessed this sin to God, received His forgiveness (intellectually and emotionally) and taken hold of my healing through repenting in faith from this unhealthy relating, and celebrating Jesus' grace and truth instead.

Then I felt rivers of tears within for the hurts others had inflicted on me, and I decided to forgive them because this had never been processed healthily. I also found that in thanking God for this healing and for forgiving me I became more connected, joyful, and at peace within. Thank you, Jesus!

A Further Revelation:

Shoving any malice/ bad energy/ or a judgmental attitude under the rug in our hearts thinking it is dealt with in this way leads to a fleshly kind of energy/ attitude that masquerades as an insensitive smile on my face. Confessing my exact malice to God, giving up the exact malice and the sin mechanism within, in faith with Jesus' help in prayer and asking God to displace it with His grace is the wise thing to do. We might have to do this regularly until this trigger or habit or rut is done away with and our minds and hearts are reprogrammed.

Further Revelation:

I became convinced that my unwanted smile was also rooted in the rationalism I adhered to in my poisoned mind by having "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" that began with the devil's lies intact within me. This rationalism asserts independence from God's wisdom, and seeks to supplant and nullify all godly wisdom, godly love, godly peace, godly patience, godly faith, good will and godly hope found in Jesus, and this rationalism seeks to usurp God's place in my heart.

Prescription

So, what is the antidote? It is journaling that leads to fellowship, learning, confession, repentance in prayer, renewing my mind with God's thoughts through relating in love with God that is guarded by Scripture, Christian community, the Holy Spirit (the anointing), remaining humble and teachable when it comes to my relationships and bowing to God's input. So, let me pray.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, I confess that I have bought into a rationalism devoid of your reality perspectives (i.e. Supernatural Love foundation) when it comes to my relationships. Because of this I judge people wrongly, maliciously, arrogantly, proudly, fearfully, in a wounded fashion every day. I choose through faith in you Lord Jesus to give up my dependence on rationalism because it does not lead to love, peace, and joy. Out of my rationalism I have judged, scoffed, hated, and been arrogant towards others throughout my 51-years of walking on this earth. I now choose to be dependent on your wisdom, life, love, shepherding, presence, promises, truth, and grace that raises my intellect, mind, and heart to where you designed them to properly function. Thank you for never giving up on me dear God. I embrace you in my heart, and I reject the devil's lies to me that I supposedly know better by myself more than any other person, including you O God, about the wrongs committed against me, and that I supposedly know better what is right and good for myself more than anyone else including you the living God. I believe in your Lordship Jesus...please help me to untangle this horrible mess in my heart/ mind/ relating style/ agendas/ and motives, so that I can be fully broken into freedom as you promised me so long

ago. Thank you, Jesus, Father God, and Holy Spirit. Amen, Amen!

More Prayer:

Lord I confess that I have such a lack of faith, a weakness, a poor-me, a self-pitying lack of confidence, uncertainty, and a chickening out courageous-less attitude when I want to claim what is mine. But I also have within me at the same time such meanness, blackness-energy, malice, "eye-for-an-eye"-thinking, and (me=good vs. them=bad) - thinking ready to seize what is mine, along with no faith that I will get what I want in the end. But at the same time, I want to be a good person and I feel I should give up what I'm entitled to so I won't be selfish. But I at the same time want to come down like a machine-like-Terminator, with force, visiting vengeance on people with a "they deserve my wrath" attitude so I can get what I think I deserve. I either wimp out sighting I should not be so mean and selfish, or I abrasively make waves to get my way in an ugliness trying to suppress as much of the darkness within as much as possible. Lord God I know I'm believing many things at the same time that are opposing each other here...I don't know how to sort it out all by myself.

Lord God I confess the above and ask for your wisdom, your thoughts on the matter because I'm caught up in a mess that needs cleaning from the inside out. Thank you!

What God said to me:

Rene, I feel for your situation, and I want to help you straighten out your bent thinking...you are right...being kind is better than meanly demanding your way as I see you have stated above. You have had a lack of faith that others will respect you and your rights...and you feel justified in fighting for your rights...but in a bad energy way...but if you believe in yourself, and believe in the goodness I have put in all people...and appeal to their desire to do what is right, good, healthy, and in a respectful healthy way...you will be free in this area.

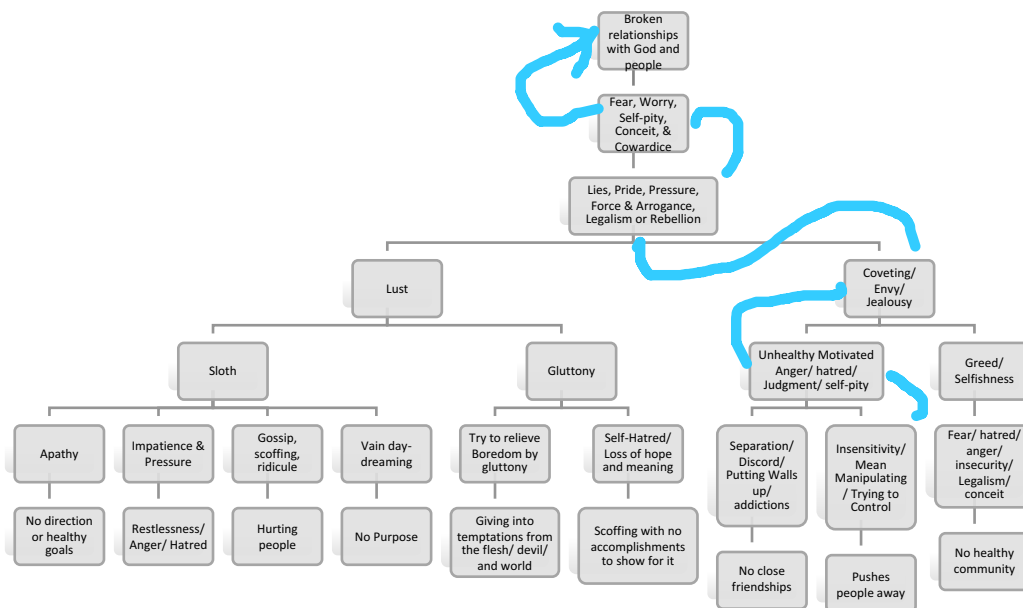
Repenting and Renewing My Mind:

Lord God, I forgive myself for not believing in myself, for believing the lies from the devil that I am a second rate loser, inept, and always on the losing side. I confess to believing the lies of the devil, and I through faith in you Jesus, give up believing them now. I change my mind and heart with your grace and truth Lord Jesus so that I am now strong, confident I have rights, and I won't wimp out and give them up only because my former strategy was ugly. I now have a healthy outlook on myself and others, with a healthy strategy to ask for stuff. I have rights like all people. But I now have a healthy peaceful place from which to deal with this weak area. The former dark mess inside of me is vanquished. Thank you for healing me Lord Jesus. Amen!

Finally, a Breakthrough Regarding Judging< Envy< Pride< Fear< Hurt Stronghold:

As I experienced what was my horrible habitual ingrained negative emotional/ attitudes again

for the thousandth time that manifested my insensitive smile I finally understood its meaning after decades of mystery. The thought that perfectly matched my feelings and finally arrived in my consciousness, saying: "What? Am I the donkey, and you the f—ken master-god? F--k I'm better than you! Screw you!" when triggered in certain relationship. It was very harsh, judgmental, envious, and proud...and it had its genesis from hurts I reacted badly to from my childhood. I prayed it through as outlined below:



Lord Jesus, I confess my inner structure of meanness< judging< envy< pride< self-pity/ conceit/ and fear in this context as active in many of my relationships; I give up saying "No" to them self-righteously, and I instead give up with your help me meanly judging people by thinking: "I'm=better vs. them=worse" when I believed the lie: "What? Am I the donkey, and you the f—ken master-god? F--k I'm better than you! Screw you!"; and I give up with your help my envy which says: "they always think they can order me around by being so disrespectful and conceited"; I also give up with your help my pride which says: "I'm better than they think I am" which wrongly insinuates they are judging me and helps put me into a box; I give up my self-pity/ fear/ and conceit...after all it is better to give than to receive; And I take back my identity from the devil...I'm a child of God, made in God's image, with His Spirit within me. Amen, and Amen! Thank you, God!

Lord Jesus I also admit to the hurt I inflicted to my own identity when I lazily chose to fail the second grade in school because of my sloth; along with me punishing myself for causing myself to be rejected by my peers in grade school. I forgive myself with your help Lord Jesus, and I receive your forgiveness and healing in this area of my life both intellectually and emotionally.

Thank you, and Amen!

But I also realized that I needed to renew my mind/ attitudes from one of rejecting servanthood to embracing it, and loving others so that I have something to give to those in need to imitate Jesus' own example in my own small way. Saturating myself in the Scriptures in a teachable fashion is key to renewing my mind as I tap into what God is specifically speaking to me. Thank you, God! Amen and Amen!

Praying Even Deeper:

Lord God I confess that I still smile insensitively and judge people; I've said "No" to it in an attempt to stop, but it does not work, so I give it up with your help through faith. Instead, I give up the smiling, insensitivity and judging I do, with your help in faith Jesus. I'm sorry for judging and wanting to condemn people to experience what I went through. I give this up with your help through faith in you Lord Jesus. I confess that I have envy that says: "I wish I was like normal people who don't have hurts" (this is a lie). Everyone has some sort of hurt, this is the truth, and something I need to hear because it was one more reason why I had trouble empathizing with others. I give up this coveting/ envy/ jealousy/ and lie with your help Lord Jesus, and choose to love and be kind to others no matter what. I confess my pride that says I'm the only one who carries big burdens, and I give it up with your help Lord Jesus. I admit that I feared rejection ever since I was first rejected by my peers in SA and the lie was my attempt at protecting myself. I give up this fear and lie; and embrace the truth that that I can handle and overcome my negative adversity with your help Lord Jesus. Thank you for your grace! This fear springs from the hurt I felt, and I choose here and now to give up my judgments against my South African peers, and I forgive myself for lying and causing the rejection in the first place. I also ask for forgiveness for visiting the above lie and resulting insensitivity on my parents, brother, and sister, besides those I met who could have used my comfort and warmth in difficult situations over the years.

Going Even Deeper Because the Smile appeared again...

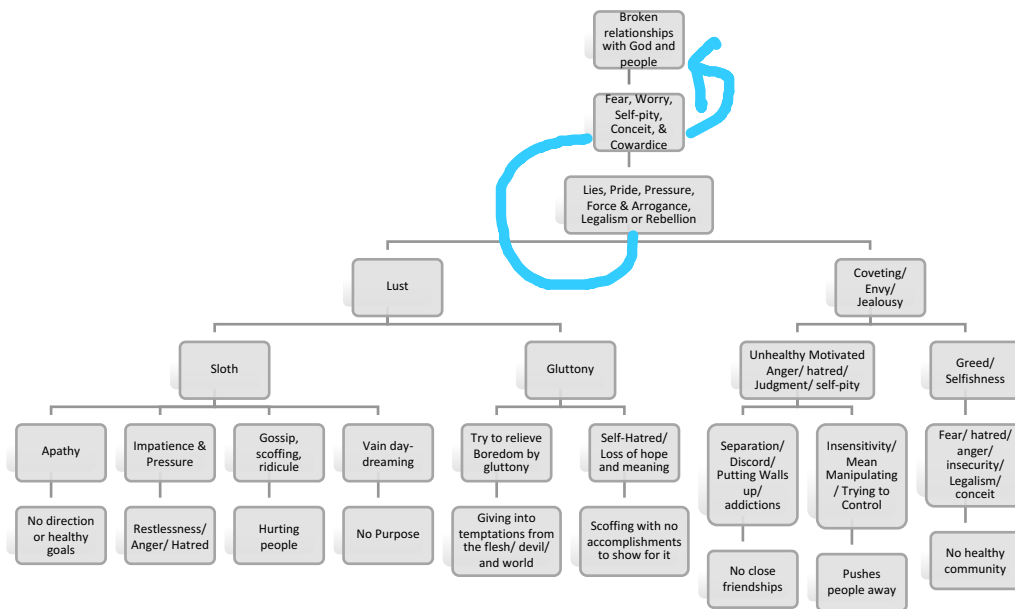
Lord Jesus, I confess that I smiled insensitively when I was confronted with an observation from another person today. The thought that matched my smile was again: "What? ...Am I the donkey...and you the ruling elite... and pompous? ... I'm better than you!" Lord Jesus, please forgive me and heal me? I receive this in faith. Thank you! Lord God, I choose to give up with faith saying "No" to this my judgment, and I instead choose to give up the judgment all through your grace and help through faith in you. Lord this means my judgment is growing out of my coveting/ envy/ jealousy. The envy of the leadership displayed by the person who broached the observation with me above. My judgment further contains this: "They always think they can set the agenda" (I'm thinking way back to Cub Scouts, with me shedding tears because I wasn't

chosen for leadership). This envy comes from my pride, I thought others should obey me because I wanted leadership and for no other good reason. I was hurt because I was rejected as leader (as someone who gets to set the agenda). Lord Jesus, I give up my judgment on my fellow scouts from back then, and I give up my childish "beef", I choose to accept their decision to not reward my self-pity and conceit. Lord God, please forgive and heal me from these sins, they are not pretty? I receive your mercy, grace and healing emotionally and intellectually in this context right now. Thank you, and Amen!

Lord God I ask you for a tolerant heart/ mind/ spirit instead of one that judges people constantly. You are my Savior, for you inspire me with your constant presence, peace, and grace as they fill me with joy, hope, and life. Thank you! Amen!

§ 11.5: Restoring A Spirit and Attitude of Worship and Exuberance:

After going to a concert, my wife commented that I was like a corpse when it came to me expressing appreciation for the music performed. The next Sunday at church I realized I did the same at church during worship. I asked God the question: "Did I make a vow to not celebrate, party, express appreciation and joy until I'm on the other side of the Pearly Gates?" He answered: "Yes!" This led to the following.



I remember being at church and getting all excited in the worship shortly before my dark night began. But because of the horribleness I experienced with my schizophrenia back then, I did not trust and became suspicious of my pastor, my church, and the teaching from the "Overflowing Grace Conference" I had bought into, and decided to withhold my celebrations from then on

until I found relief and security like I had known it before. I gave up living, and started focusing on only getting healthy and that is literally what I did until I prayed the following prayer.

Prayer:

Lord, I confess that I have held back from celebrating, giving of self (in love and taking chances), in expressing my exuberance, joy, and appreciation physically in worshipping you, loving people, and loving myself. I have done so as a proud person out of fear and pride. Fear of being hurt and ridiculed; and also because of my conceit and cowardice. I ask for your forgiveness Lord Jesus, and for healing in this area in my life and receive it both intellectually and emotionally. I give up my corpse posture that has strangled the life, emotions, cares, and joy out of me. I give up my pride, conceit, cowardice, and fears in this area through faith in and with your help Lord Jesus. I choose to live fully in your unconditional love Lord Jesus.

12 ENTER THE TREE OF LIFE

There were two trees in the garden of Eden as recorded in the first book of the Bible³⁴. We have looked at one of them: “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in depth and now we will look at the tree of life.

The tree of life is not man-made, it is not fabricated by angelic hands. This tree is Jesus. Jesus is the only foundation that can sustain healthy life, and if we reject Him we reject life. I have spoken a lot about little “t”-truths and how important they are, but without Jesus they become empty philosophies, devoid of power to heal, make strong, and give us freedom and peace.

The tree of life bears good fruit such as love, patience, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control through the Holy Spirit. We can belong, remain, and abide in this tree of life out of a humble teachable faith in Jesus. Jesus is the foundation and the structure of the tree of life as we are one with Him through faith.

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” is a structure made from commitments to beliefs and expectations based on lies, guilt, fears, anger, and self-pity rooted in broken-relationship-wounds that negatively impact our lives with the building-energy-blocks of pride, coveting, envy, greed, judging, lust, sloth, and gluttony.

The structure that gives life, is rooted in unconditional love that grows with the wisdom from above (i.e. with truth) that is positive, kind, gentle, compassionate, and is based on healthy peaceful beliefs, commitments, and unselfish expectations that bears good fruit and healthy relating.

Jesus came that we might have life to the full, and He offers both truth and grace to make it possible. He came to show us that relationship with God through faith in Him that leads to love is the path for that life. Jesus died on a cross once for all to save and heal all. He did not come to condemn but came to restore in each of us health, holiness, justice, peace, love, and hope through faith in Him.

The first beatitude found in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus taught is: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”³⁵ In today’s language, this means, “Blessed are the humble, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” That is what the Sermon on the Mount hinges on. That is what this book hinges on. Not a false humility, but one that is nurtured through relationship with God through Jesus Christ through faith and grace. Faith is not a force that we muster and exert, or a technique that gets God’s attention and makes Him love us

³⁴ Cf. Genesis 2:9

³⁵ Matthew 5:3

more. No! Faith is like opening a door that lets Jesus into our lives, so we can talk with him and He with us, so that we can have community, and touch one another in love and grow in fellowship. This allows Jesus to grow us in love and so become a blessing to others we know now and have still to meet.

Jesus said that if one builds on the Rock (Jesus Himself-through a living faith relationship) with His guidance, empowering presence (grace) and teachings found in The Sermon on the Mount then one would weather any storm that threatens. Jesus is the structure for Life and blue print (or understanding or Wisdom) we ought to build our attitudes through healthy prayer (relationship) that inspires healthy positive energy that bear healthy actions and supports life.

The parable of the Mustard Seed³⁶ is about a seed that is so tenacious that it grows into a tree/bush in the most difficult places (think of stony hearts) and when it is mature is able to support the birds of the air. The birds symbolize freedom, life, or people-delicately-dependent-on-plenty-of-patience because life is so often messy, difficult and fragile. This Wisdom or tree or understanding in us is able to support all of this to the glory of God because it is sustained by God who is ever present. We need to be maintained, cared for, watered, and pruned so we will grow healthily. This book gives advice on how God the Father (the Vinedresser) cares for the true Vine: Jesus and us the branches that choose to remain in Him.

Connection, relationship, and fellowship with Jesus through faith, love, and hope are where life is at because He promises to never leave me nor forsake. If all we are focused on are principles, theology, rules, and laws we will miss Jesus and the grace and peace He wants to pour into our lives. What or who we care about is most important to us. Learning to distinguish Jesus voice from others, and to commit to caring for people with His Light (guidance) is critical. If we don't have Jesus, we don't have life.

The best place to act from is PEACE. If we don't have it then we will search for it and sometimes search for it in the wrong places which can result in idol worship. When we act from the place of Jesus' PEACE, then we have grace amply supplied, and God does His will through us.

There is the world (system), and the devil that both seek to corrupt us together with the "sin nature". I have spoken much about the "flesh or sin nature" and the strongholds of sin: "the tree of knowledge of good and evil", but very little about the devil and the world (system). The world and the devil both have voices that try to replace Jesus' voice, direction, care, love, and peace in our lives with counterfeits and lies. But Jesus gives us a choice in the matter: do we want life or death? It does matter how we direct our hunger and thirst, what we enjoy, and entertain ourselves with, and why. Whatever we choose God will give us the fullness of in the

³⁶ Cf. Mark 4:31

end. The choices are ours!

13 CONCLUSION

Any process to wholeness is a journey. It isn't a pit stop. I ask Jesus often what He wants me to do next. He often tells me to “hope” and I finally understand that He means for me to journey with Him, talk with Him through Journalling, and as things, situations, and people come into my life and help to trigger stuff inside of me. Then that is on my plate to deal with as an opportunity to dismantle “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me more, and for spiritual growth to occur. I count this process as all joy. This is done more healthily by entering into Jesus’ peace, believing in and counting on His grace, and standing on His truth.

There are always new things to learn and to grow in the practice of doing; with hope, faith, and love being influenced by Jesus being the focus.

I am realizing more that healing comes into my life through forgiving the agents of my hurts one at a time, and by receiving the forgiveness of my sins from God. I also need to jettison fear, conceit, angry pressure and self-pity to dismantle the rest of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me with Jesus’ grace and truth.

None of us are perfect. Those interested in freedom, will usually have a number of issues (I've had hundreds) they are aware of, that need healing. Working on the ones that Jesus points out is key to not getting negative or overwhelmed or discouraged. We need to always look back and see the work God has done in our lives when our faiths are challenged, and to not give up.

The list of sins mentioned below I believe can be tackled using some similar methodologies/ theologies based on the contents from this book by adding them to a “tree of knowledge of good and evil” diagram, and asking God for awareness about the connections so that confession and strategic prayer can be lifted up to bring healing. Obviously, my strategy in this book has its limitations. Other sources of wisdom, truth, principles, and methodologies from the Christian community will be required for a more thorough interior house cleaning like Jesus requests from us in the Gospels.

I don't intend any judgment, hatred, malice, or meanness towards those who struggle with any of the sins mentioned below.³⁷ I think we all struggle with some of them in some ways; “judge not lest I be judged” is my motto. Sin is defined as something that is unhealthy, and no judgments are intended by me in listing some of them here, because I am a sinner, and no better than anyone else.

Sins, such as: lying, cheating, stealing, murder, brutality, brawling, idol-worship, materialism,

³⁷ Having broken one command, we have broken the whole Law cf. James 2:10

devaluing people, abusive authority, manipulation, self-righteousness, withholding help from the poor, not helping the weak and disadvantaged, suppressing justice, hypocrisy, verbal abuse, violence, child abuse, rape, pedophilia, witchcraft, malice, hating men, misogyny, disrespecting people, bigotry, and all the different kinds of sexual immorality mentioned in the New Testament Bible.

There, this is where my journey that the Holy Spirit has taken me on so far has landed me to. Things are not stagnant.

Thanks for taking an interest in what I have written in this book, and for putting up with my constant repetition and emphasis for the need to confess, repent, and renew interiorly ourselves through the grace and truth found in Jesus in payer with the back drop of Scripture, and the strategies found in this book. I leave you with what I wish for myself and for all:

The Lord bless you
and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.³⁸

I entrust you to the Lord, and those who will guide you more deeply in the ways of truth, humility, grace and love, and not with empty philosophies. I encourage you to seek to grow in two-way conversation with God for friendship sake, and with the aim of loving people more than concepts.

³⁸ Number 6:24-26

FURTHER READING

I am aware that the approach formed in this book may help some people, but I am sure that it won't help everyone to become completely free and enjoy life the way Jesus intends them to. Books I'd recommend that touch on topics I missed or glossed over are:

- (1) *Can You Hear Me?* by Brad Jersak, (ideal for building two-way prayer)
- (2) *Battle Field of The Mind* by Joyce Meyer, (ideal for learning to think healthily, positively, and maintain it)
- (3) *How to Hear God's Voice* by Mark and Patti Virkler, (ideal for building two-way prayer)
- (4) *Imagine Heaven* by John Burke, (ideal for seeing God as love, and non-judgmental...also gives glimpses of Heaven and Hell)
- (5) *Living Beyond Your Feelings* by Joyce Meyer,
- (6) *The Root of Rejection* by Joyce Meyer,
- (7) *Change Your Words Change Your Life* by Joyce Meyer,
- (8) *Emotionally Free* by Dr. Grant Mullen,
- (9) *Waking the Slumbering Spirit* by John and Paula Sandford,
- (10) *Tired of Trying To Measuring Up* by Jeff VanVonderen,
- (11) *Soul Repair* by Jeff VanVonderen and Dale & Juanita Ryan
- (12) *Healing the past Releasing the Future* by Frank & Catherine Fabiano,
- (13) *Unbound* by Neal Lozano,
- (14) *The Pressure's Off* by Dr. Larry Crabb,
- (15) *Freedom From Addiction* by Neil T. Anderson
- (16) *Breaking The Bondage Of Legalism* by Neil T. Anderson
- (17) *Winning The Battle Within* by Neil T. Anderson
- (18) *The Bondage Breaker* by Neil T. Anderson
- (19) *Freedom From Fear* by Neil T. Anderson
- (20) *Liberating Prayer* by Neil T. Anderson
- (21) *Finding God's Will* by Neil T. Anderson
- (22) *When The Spirit Comes In Power* by Peter Herbeck,

- (23) *The Twelve Steps: A Spiritual Journey, A Working Guide For Healing,*
- (24) *Anger: Handling A Powerful Emotion In A Healthy Way* by Gary Chapman,
- (25) *Boundaries* by Dr. Henry Cloud, & Dr. John Townsend,
- (26) *Healing The Wounded Spirit* by John & Paula Sandford,
- (27) *Becoming A Family That Heals* by Drs. Beverly and Tom Rodgers,
- (28) *Inside Out* by Dr. Larry Crabb,
- (29) *Finding God* by Dr. Larry Crabb

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I lived my early life in South Africa, but have lived since then in Canada. I am now married to a beautiful woman named Sophie. I have struggled with Schizophrenia since 1992. I have struggled with many addictions. I am still fighting the fight of faith to love people more deeply.