

Relating to Personal Spiritual ‘Strongholds’

Most of the material in this section has been derived from Robert McGee’s book Search for Significance and the retreat “Healing for the Nations” by Steve and Rujon Morrison. Used by permission.

Objective: To be able to identify false beliefs and utilize God’s provision to break free.

1. Missionary pressures reveal spiritual strongholds

There was a time of greatest ministerial achievement pressure on me, causing spiritual flaws to be revealed in my life. These flaws nearly took my life, marriage and ministry. When I learned about the provisions made for every Christian by the blood of Christ, and how to detect the false thinking put on by the enemy, I was set free in Christ in a new and victorious way. Since then we have seen hundreds learn this powerful, simple and lasting application of God’s truth.

The Bridge Illustration - A bridge which was built one hundred years ago to carry a horse and cart, after one hundred years a large truck would crumble the same bridge which was built to carry much less weight. A person may be seen as a healthy, fruitful person when living in his home county, but when subjected to cultural uncertainties, relocation adjustments, new language, and a different spiritual environment, cracks may begin to appear and a break-up could happen.

2. Satan is our accuser

The accuser of our brethren, he who keeps bringing before our God charges against them day and night, has been cast out! And they have overcome (conquered) him by means of the blood of the Lamb and by the utterance of their testimony, for they did not love and cling to life even when faced with death [holding their lives cheap till they had to die for their witnessing].

Revelation 12:10-11 (Amplified)

A Personal Spiritual Stronghold is a devilish thought that has taken the place of God’s truth in a person’s heart. Evidence of this thought is fear, leading to ungodly behavior.

- **Webster’s Dictionary definition:** “fastener, a fortified place; security”

- **Strong’s Concordance definition:**

4679 (OT)	-fastener
4686 (OT)	-a net - capture, snare, strong place
	-example of Saul walking into a cave where David was
4694 (OT)	-mound (high place), rampart
3749- (NT)	-a castle - a place where a king reigns

Each word conveys the idea of domination, captivity, inability to act according to one’s own will (right or wrong). It is a means to control our will. This is against the scriptural truth of freedom in Christ.

3. Jesus’ example of complete freedom:

“For the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me” John 14:30

Toy car illustration - Toy cars have a hand-held remote control which usually has no physical attachment to the toy. A signal is sent by the control and received by a component in the toy which responds. A believer may have no physical attachment to a devil, but if there is a devilish thought inside the believer, a signal corresponding to that thought will be received causing a corresponding response usually contrary to godly behavior.

Of all people, Jesus had the greatest reason to have negative emotions and vindictive behavior. He was falsely accused, tortured, denuded, rejected, and left alone with all His work seemingly ruined. A sinful response would have called for bitterness, anger, retaliation, etc. Scripture says, *“like a sheep before its shearers is silent, He did not open His mouth.”* Isaiah 53. Because the “prince of this world” had nothing in Him--no sinful, doubtful, impure or false thoughts - He was able “for the joy set before Him he endured the cross and scorned the shame.”

4. Paul’s description of spiritual strongholds:

*“For though we walk [live] in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons. For the weapons of our warfare are not physical (weapons of flesh and blood), but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of **strongholds**, [Inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasoning (pretensions - NIV) and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the (true) knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive in the obedience of Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, Being in readiness to punish every [insubordinate for his] disobedience, when your own submission and obedience {as a church} are fully secured and complete.* 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

5. Indicators of a spiritual stronghold:

a. Fear - Fear controls, keeps us in bondage, locks us in a pattern of behavior which prohibits us from doing God’s will, glorifying Him, and enjoying Him. Fear is the stronghold. If we were to be free of all fear except the reverential fear of God, nothing would be impossible for us. Our faith would propel us into the hands of God. We would be people most blessed.

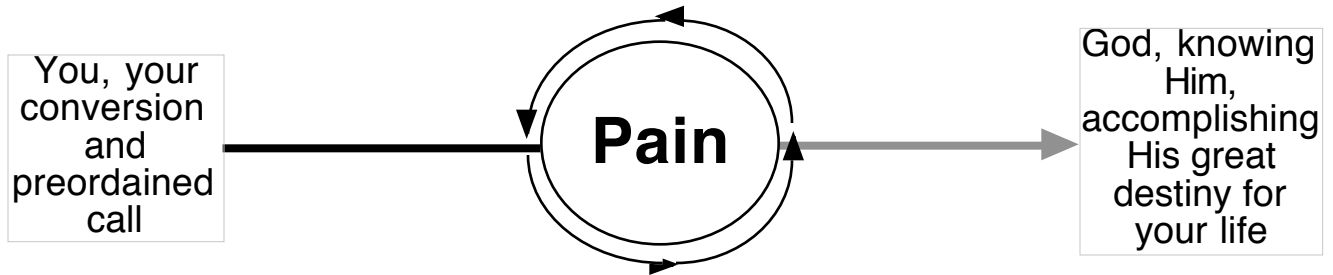
b. Abnormal behavior - uncontrolled emotions, anger, eating disorders, withdrawal, control.

c. Pain - Emotional pain is the “The Gift That Nobody Wants.” It is a friend because in the absence of joy, peace, and the feeling of being loved, there is a clear indication that a stronghold (s) is / are in operation. Alternative methods of dealing with pain include drug use, alcohol, excessive work, television, sleep, anger , religion, _____, _____.

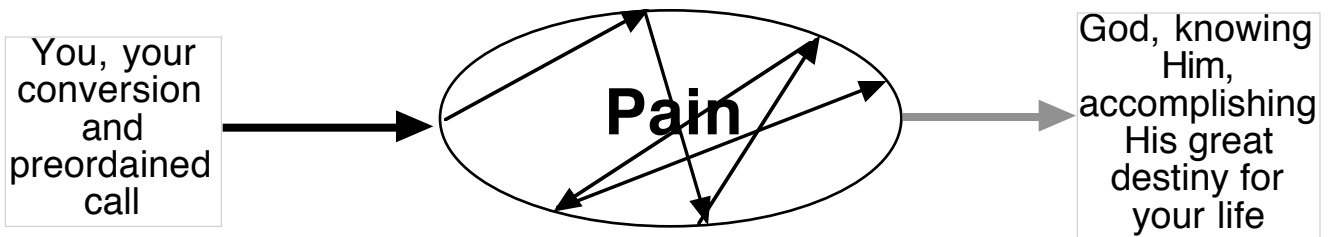
6. Learning through pain

Many people start off strong in the Christian life until difficulties arise. There are three ways to deal with pain:

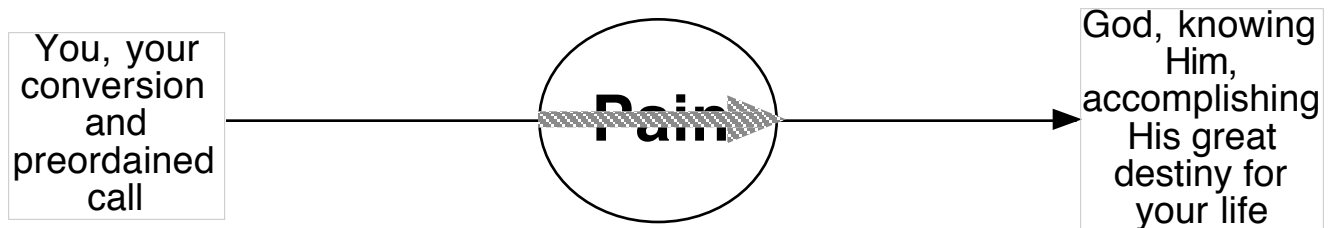
1. Avoid it and never learn what God has designed for us. This can result in spiritual immaturity, even after many years.



2. Enter the pain but never learn how to deal with it. Some people, by disbelief or mere ignorance of the truth, stay in areas of pain without appropriating God's provisions.



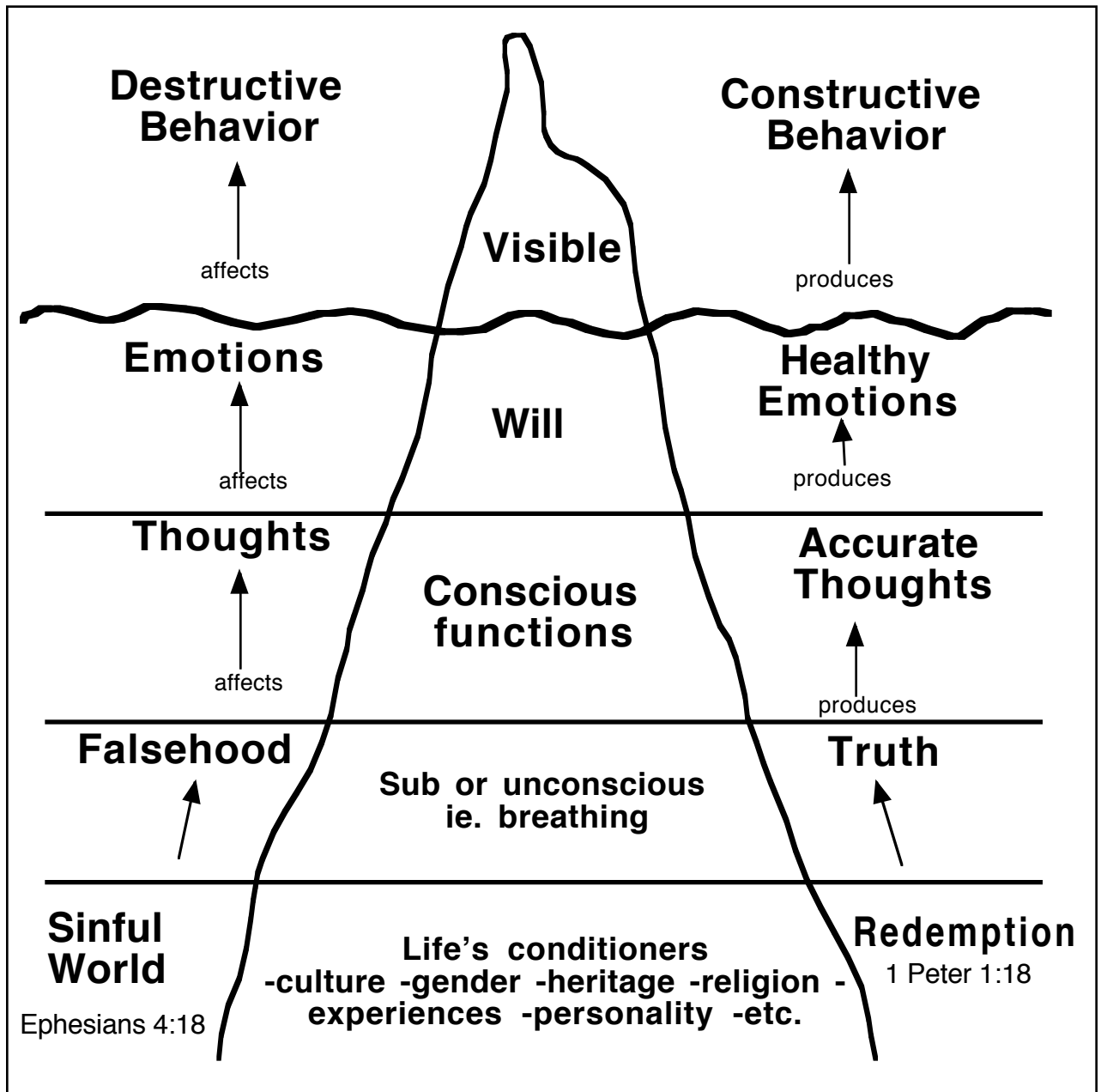
3. Go right through it, seeking God and His purposes, without running from it. These times of pain are similar to Jesus own temptation and suffering, yet they are not isolated incidence, but may occur and reoccur, or even be an ongoing "thorn in the flesh." The goal is to learn from them. Remember our destiny is not only to believe but also to suffer for His sake (1 Peter).



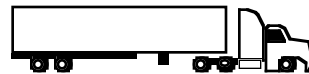
• Remember this diagram because it will reveal a great spiritual principle.

7. How personal spiritual strongholds develop

The Iceberg Illustration shows the upward progression of human spiritual development. The right shows those that build on a Biblical world view with proper thoughts. The left shows a secular mind leading to poor behavior.



Illustrating the Iceberg in life:



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A truck driver sees a ball roll into the street followed by a child, then hears a thud on the side of the truck. His thoughts (racing at 2,500 miles a minute) tell him, "I hit the child," "He is dead" "I'm going to loose my job," "I'll loose my house," "My wife will leave me," "I won't see my children." So he flees the scene living out his years in guilt and fear. If he, on the other hand, stopped to see that it was only the ball he hit, his mind would be proven wrong and he would hence live out his days in a normal, happy way.

8. False thinking is at the root of evil in the human heart

- The heart is the seat of beliefs and contains the roots of every imaginable sin. False beliefs will surface in spiritual conflict.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*
Psalm 139:23

*Be angry [or stand in awe] and sin not; commune with your own hearts upon your
beds and be silent (sorry for the things you say in your hearts). Selah [pause, and
calmly think of that]*
Psalm 4:4 (Amplified)

*Therefore thus says the Lord [to Jeremiah]: If you return [and give up this mistaken
tone of distrust and despair], then I will give you again a settled place of quiet and
safety, and you will be My minister; and if you separate the precious from the vile
[cleansing your own heart from unworthy and unwarranted suspicions concerning
God's faithfulness], you shall be My mouthpiece. [But do not yield to them.] Let them
return to you--not you to [the people].*
Jeremiah 15:19 (Amplified)

9. The power of the blood of Christ breaks strongholds

- The blood of Christ is powerful and effectively cleanses our hearts from spiritual strongholds standing in the way of God's wonderful truth.

*And they have overcome (conquered) him by means of the blood of the Lamb and by
the utterance of their testimony, for they did not love and cling to life even when
faced with death [holding their lives cheap till they had to die for their witnessing].*
Revelation 12:11 (Amplified)

*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

10. The Lord is the true stronghold delivering us from fear.

-Fear creates a need for strongholds in our life. The Lord is the only true stronghold.

*THE LORD is my Light and my Salvation--whom shall I fear or dread?
The Lord is the Refuge and Stronghold of my life--of whom shall I be afraid?*
Psalm 27:1

11. Four Fears of Personal Identity¹

Each of these fears provides a basis for false thinking resulting in spiritual strongholds. Conversely, the four basic doctrines provided by salvation in Christ deal directly with each of these fears.²

• Fear of Failure

• Performance Trap

• Description

It is like a performance trap. People who have a fear of failure consciously or subconsciously say:

“I need to meet certain standards to feel good about myself, if I don’t meet those standards I am nothing.”

In other words: *“My Self Worth = my performance.”*
 “I must be successful to feel good about myself.”
 “I must meet standards to feel good about myself.”
 “I am what I do”

These standards, or imposed expectations, relate to how good we are as Christians. The devil will try to get us to believe that because we have sinned, or are not being “good” Christians, God is not happy with us and therefore not inclined to be with us or bless us.

• Manifestation

Striving, stress, burnout. Life for a person with a Fear of Failure is like a video game; when you pass the first level you go to the next until you can’t go anymore.

Stress is produced when the external expectations exceed the internal resources to meet those expectations.

Perfectionism - everything must be of the highest standard.

Withdrawal - will come from the criticism.

Anger, depression, low motivation, chemical dependency. Putting self down, defensiveness, making excuses, blaming others, lying, covering up, blowing up, lowering the standard, joking, sarcasm, minimizing risks, sabotage.

¹ Robert McGee discovered that there are four fears basic to all humans. You can read about his findings in his book entitled [Search for Significance](#).

² A self evaluation of for all the Fears is available in Appendix I

• Fear of Rejection

• Approval Addict

• Description

It is an addiction to approval. People who have a fear of rejection consciously or subconsciously say:

“I need the acceptance, approval and respect of certain others in order to feel good about myself.”

In other words: *My self worth = my performance + the opinions of others.*³

“Others” include: leaders, parents, friends, spouses, teachers, and especially God.

This is an important principle to understand about human psyche:

*“I’m not what I think I am,
I’m not what you think I am,
I am what I think you think I am.”*

If I think you think I am ugly, that is what I’ll be. You may think I am good looking, but I still think you think otherwise, so when I am around you I’ll feel ugly. God consistently thinks good things about us, as scripture tells us. If we think He turns away from us because of our incompleteness, we will walk in a way showing that He is away from us. The opposite is also true.

• Manifestation

- a. Attempting to please others (at any cost).
- b. Dependence on others for feelings of personal worth.
- c. Being easily manipulated by others.
- d. Fearing intimate relationships (loneliness) and becoming unable to love.
- e. Developing a need to rescue others. You can get a rush being the source of meeting needs, but later you will burn out.
- f. Becoming overly sensitive to criticism.
- g. Controlling others so they can’t afford to not accept us.

³ The opposite can also be true. The opinions of others = my performance + self worth. Encouragement enables, discouragement disables.

“You’ve got to like me or you will suffer.”

“The deep need of man is to overcome separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness.”

*We all need to have a sense of being intimately “plugged in”.
We are invincible when we are in the presence of God, and we know it.*

• **Provision - Reconciliation**

Why would God never reject us because of reconciliation?

We are recipients of a relationship of peace and harmony brought about by God.

My self worth = The value of the blood of Christ

We are reconciled through Christ’s blood. (Romans 5:6-11, Ephesians 2:12-22)

Sin destroyed our harmony with God, making us hostile toward the one whom we sense must be our judge. Objectively and psychologically we are placed in a position of hostility, at enmity with one whose only desire is to express His love.

In the Hebrew language to express something of infinite size of quality you would repeat the word twice. For example; if you are walking down the street in you see a pothole you tell you friend there is a hole. If a bomb fell and the hole is large enough to drive a bus into you say there is a hole hole. If you see a hole and look into it and can not see the bottom due to its depth you say there is a hole hole hole.

In Hebrews 13:5-6, the original transliterated Old Testament Hebrew passage read,

“He (God) Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up (reject you) nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless, nor forsake nor let [you] down, [relax My hold on you]. - Assuredly not! So we take comfort and are encouraged and confidently and boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, I will not be seized with alarm I will not fear or dread or be terrified. What can man do to me? (Amplified Bible)

Three negatives precede the verb in this passage making it infinitely impossible for God to leave us in a rejected state. The implication is clear, we are plugged into God and can not be detached.

• Fear of Punishment

• The Blame Game

• Description

It is a blame game. People who have a fear of punishment consciously or subconsciously say:

“Those who fail are not worthy of love but rather deserve to be punished.”

In other words: *“To be loved you must meet one’s standard.”*
 “Those who succeed are worthy of love and deserve to be rewarded.”

• The origins of fear of punishment

What if the only time you ever saw yourself was through a fun house mirror? You would have a distorted view of self. The family you grow up in is your “fun house mirror.” The definition of normal changes from person to person due to family.

We may have a distorted view of achievement and failure due to our upbringing. Doing or being right (our justice system) shapes how we feel about ourselves and others. If we or another fail to meet these standards a price must be paid, someone must be punished.⁴

• Manifestation

- a. Belittling others and myself (looking for a scapegoat).
- b. Blaming others for personal failure (because our success often depends on their contribution or lack of it). We use condemnation to manipulate them to improve their performance. It also puts a safe distance between their failure and our fragile self worth.
- c. Passivity (minimizing risks).
- d. Withdrawing from God and others.
- e. Name calling (self condemnation), making self depreciating jokes or statements, or never allowing any room for error in our performance.
- f. Harshness (physically or verbally abusing), or being sarcastic or silent.
- g. Vengeance or anger (blowing up). *“I’ll make you sorry for what you did.”*
- h. Making excuses, justifying, covering up, lowering the standard, joking, sarcasm.

⁴ Some people do not know grace, instead they know license (nothing is wrong or right).

• Provision - Propitiation

Propitiation is a little used word in modern English. It means “to satisfy righteous anger.” An example of Propitiation is if someone was violated by fraud, theft, or any other injustice, a whipping post would be set up and it would become the object of the offended’s fury and wrath. Jesus was that whipping post for sinful human beings. God was offended, His rage inflamed. All of it was then poured out on the body of Jesus.

Knowing this we have to ask the question: if Jesus bore such awful pain, the punishment for our sins, should we have the audacity to think we can squeeze out more? There are two problems with this: One, it would be an offense to Jesus to think that His sacrifice of propitiation was not sufficient for all our sins. Two, it would elevate us to the status of co-redeemer by the assertion that we have some goodness in us to be able to stand in such a high position.

Need to learn God’s justice system



- **There is a difference between punishment and discipline.** Christians need to understand that suffering is also part of the plan God has for His children. This suffering is equipping us for eternity. It is making us more like Christ.⁵
- The N.T. idea of chastisement doesn't at all have negative connotations. The idea is more in line with training.
- *PAIDEUO* - (Vines) denotes training children; the broad idea of education, instruction and correction by words, reproof, infliction of evils or calamities.
punishment = past performance, retrospective
discipline = present and future oriented, positive, focused on growth, intended to give you a workout
- I have a message entitled, “God is not nor will He be angry with a believer.” Can you believe this?

“In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you. To me this is like the days of Noah when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again...”

Isaiah 54:8-9

⁵ Notes on Affliction and Belief in Appendix J

• Fear of Shame

• Hopelessness

• Description

This is the “mother of all strongholds.” People who have a fear of shame consciously or subconsciously say:

*“You are = what you do”
(If you are what you do and you don’t, you ain’t.)*

In other words: *“I am what I am, I’m hopeless (I’m stuck with me),”
“Not only do I do bad, I am bad.”*

• Manifestation

Striving - If I do enough, accomplish enough, I’ll discover who I am.

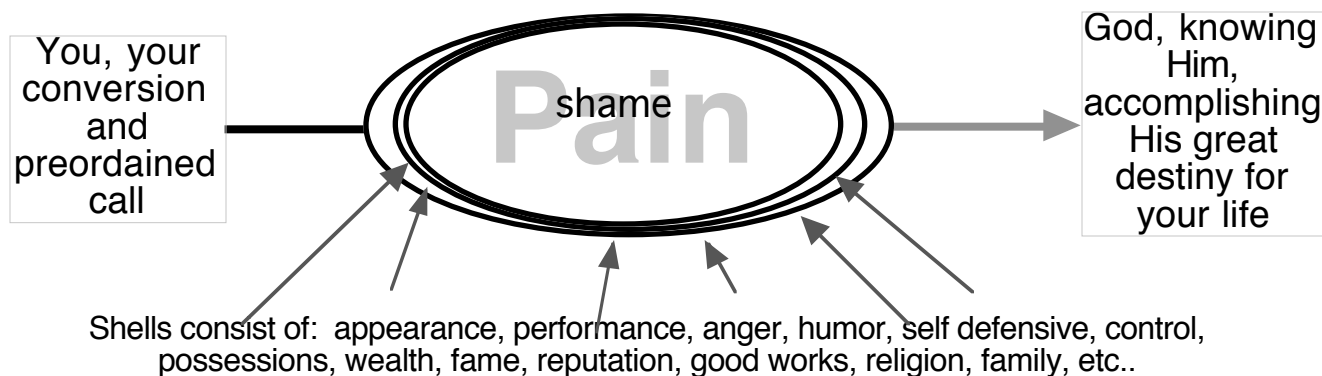
Regret - If only I had done things differently.

Performance - If I perform well others will tell me who I am.

Resignation - My will is in the hands of other people.

Creating shells or coverings to portray an image of who you feel would be most acceptable and to hide the universal, inherent shame.

“They realized they were naked so they sowed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” Genesis 3:6-10



Suicide - When all the shells are broken in a person’s life, left only to feel the shame, suicide is an alternative. Suicide is the extreme form of hopelessness. It is Satan’s ultimate answer for those who can not deal with shame.

• Provision - Regeneration

Regeneration is the spiritual change wrought in man by the Holy Spirit, by which he becomes the possessor of a new life. It is a change in our moral and spiritual nature.

Satan has a plan to defeat Christians by distorting truth. Remember, he has been totally defeated by Jesus through the cross. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me. Therefore, Satan has no authority but uses deceit to steal and destroy.

Satan lets every Christian know the flaws and sins they have. He will say, "You're no good," "You can't be a Christian if you're doing this," "You are bad," "God can't love you," "You can never change." Scripture says:

"The accuser of the brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down." Revelation 12:10

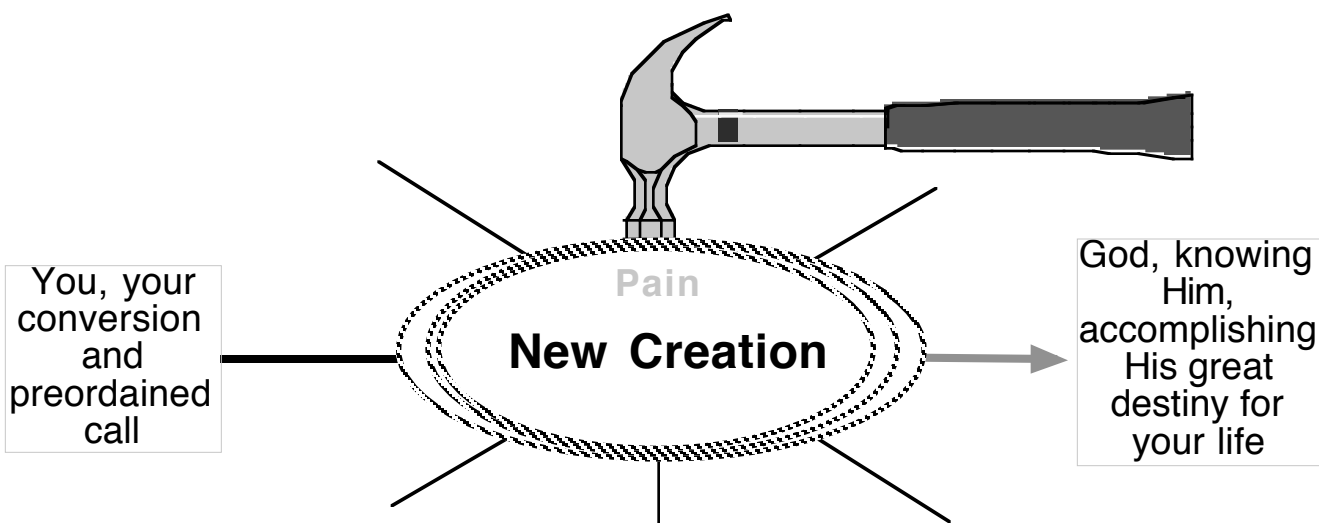
God's wonderful provision is not to just cover our sins and an old nature which is shame-filled and bent toward sin; it is to replace that nature with a nature after His very own, governed by the Holy Spirit.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."
2 Corinthians 5:17

After conversion, a honeymoon time begins to wear off. God wants to reveal the new nature in us. But in order to do this the mental, emotional, and spiritual shells we adopted to cover our old self need to be removed. The discipline process is that which God brings about to shed the shells in order that the life of Christ in us can be manifested.

God's answer is also "death"-- death to the things which self-preservation and self-will created apart from God and His provision.

"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed."
John 12:24



12. Defining and Breaking Strongholds⁶

a. Introduction of strongholds

Key verses - 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 9:9, 27:1,144:2; Zephaniah 3:6.

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” 2 Corinthians. 10:3-5.

Strongholds can defeat you on the mission field.

b. Definition of a stronghold

A childlike thought which gains strength through life experiences. It is not a behavior. It becomes a powerful life message and is the place where we have embraced a lie rather than the truth.

c. Why strongholds must be destroyed

They will destroy you, your relationships, and your ministry. Satan will attack you strongly on the mission field in the area of strongholds in your life. They can affect your success, your health, how you feel about yourself and God, your identity and destiny, etc.

d. How to destroy strongholds

You cannot destroy the stronghold by yourself. You have to invite God to do it. We destroy it through His divine power and through taking our thoughts captive.

13. How To Benefit From The Strongholds Teaching

- a. Practice the trip-ins when an occasion comes up which brings you into a negative emotional pattern. The enemy will do all he can to distract you from doing a trip-in. We learn so many things that we lose, because we don't practice them. Don't let the devil rob you. This is your choice. Choose life!

⁶ For additional information see Appendix

- b. Study the trip-in materials. Go over the four fears again and again. Read the addition books by Robert McGee, especially Search for Significance.
- c. Make sure that you fill out the complete trip-in page. Do both the top and the bottom of the trip-in, or you will not have the victory. You must diligently complete the whole thing, and give God undistracted time to speak into your life.
- d. Have an accountability partner or mentor to help you. Share what you have learned at the camp, and ask them to remind you and hold you accountable to do the trip-ins.
- e. Start a journal. If you don't have much time, even two or three sentences will help you. Look for patterns, and detect strongholds.
- f. Memorize II Corinthians 10:3-5 and Ephesians 4:17-14. II Corinthians 10:3-5 is the key verses on strongholds.
- g. Go through the trip-in with others. Everyone has strongholds and needs help in this area. You will be amazed at how God uses you in the lives of others.
- h. Make a time line within the next two weeks. Look for emotional patterns and an overriding emotion or major theme in your time line.
- i. Resist the devil, and pray for endurance. Know that you must be willing to engage the enemy long enough to defeat him.

Trip - In Form

Situation _____

Thoughts

Emotions

Behaviors

Confession

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23-24

Thoughts

Emotions

Behavior