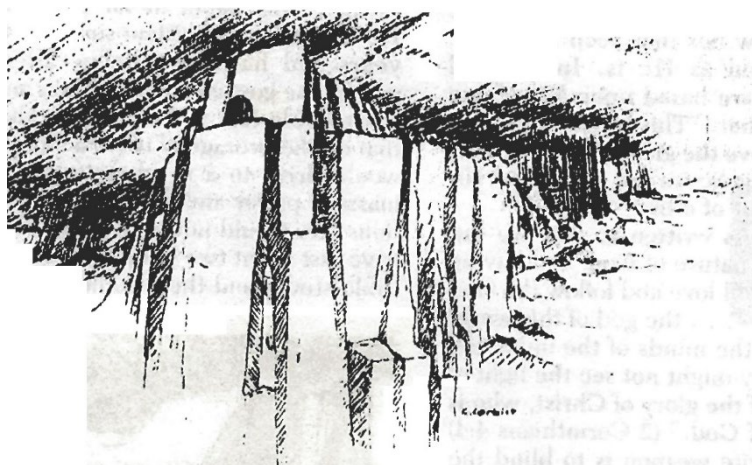




The Building Up and Tearing down of Strongholds

By Danny Daniels

"Sometimes I wish I had never given my heart to Christ. It's just too hard. I would go back if I could!" This cry is familiar to many souls who have begun to follow Christ but whose sins of the past still haunt them, and the pulls of the present seem to overwhelm them. "I desire to walk with God, but I just can't seem to do it." Are you aware of the war — the battle for your soul?



God commands man to "... possess ye your souls...." (Luke 21:19) Another translation says, "By your perseverance you will win your souls." (NAS) Just like Israel was commanded to possess Canaan, the promised land of milk and honey, so we too are commanded to possess our soul (mind, emotion, and will) through which God will occupy us and express His life. "Since you have in obedience to the truth *purified your souls* ... love one another from the heart." (1 Peter 1:22 NAS)

Canaan was the land promised to Israel, and they were to live there in fellowship with God. It was a great place to live, but there was a problem. Somebody else lived there too! There were ungodly people who had been there many years. Until these people and their lifestyles were removed, there could not be peace, happiness, and godliness in the land.

Joshua's battle strategy for clearing the land of Canaan can be the same that we use for clearing the land of our soul. Our souls are cluttered with sin patterns — certain "besetting" sins and habits, and compulsions. Uncontrolled thoughts and actions have become veritable fortresses and strongholds. These must be torn down so the Christian can enter the abundant life of the Spirit-filled walk.

The Lord gave Joshua guidelines for battle, and they can also be our strategy for removing the enemy.

Guidelines for Battle

1. Depend on the Lord's strength and guidance, not your own. The Lord will go before you to lead the way. The battle is the Lord's, not yours. He is the commander and boss. Rely on His strength. "Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's." (2 Chronicles 20:15 NAS)



2. I will not drive them out before you in a single year..." Exodus 23:29 NAS) There is no such thing as instant maturity. The strongholds begin to fall one by one. Areas like lust, fear, worry, gluttony, lying, etc. fall one at a time. Normally, it won't happen in one prayer meeting or in a week-long conference. God's way is little by little. The strongholds were built little by little; normally they are removed the same way. It takes time.

3. Take possession of the land and become fruitful in it. As we possess the land (our soul area), we clear it of rocks and weeds (sin). Then we become fruitful in it. We let God produce the fruit of His Spirit where the fruit of the flesh used to be.

Strongholds Are Satan's Strategy

Have you ever wondered why Satan is so determined to build strongholds in a person's life? There are at least two reasons. First, whenever there is an evil stronghold, Satan is lord in that particular area. He is king — ruler — the one obeyed. And in reality, the one we obey is the one we worship. Satan desires honor and worship! As we allow strongholds to remain, we are paying homage to him. We are really worshipping him and his way.

Second, strongholds keep us from seeing and knowing God. As a person begins to know God and His ways, he no longer will desire the ways of the world. Satan's job is to keep us blinded to the full, blessed, happy, prosperous, and totally fulfilling ways of God. That's why Paul prayed for the church: "(I pray that) God ... may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the true knowledge of Him." (Ephesians 1:17 NAS) Peter asked that grace and peace be multiplied to us and that we become partakers of God's own life as we know God the father and His Son Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:2-3)

Satan desires to keep us from knowing God. That is why he raises up speculations and lofty reasoning against God. (2 Corinthians 10:5) Lies like, "God doesn't love you! ... You'll be miserable if you make Jesus your Lord! ... If God really loved you, this and so would not have happened." These are just a few lies that keep man from knowing God as He is. In fact, all strongholds are based upon lies of one kind or another. "This lust isn't so bad. After all, I love the girl and plan to marry her." "This lie isn't so bad. After all, it gets me out of a bad situation."

The Bible is written so that we can see the true nature of God; and having seen it, we will love and follow the God of the Bible. "...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:4) Satan's favorite weapon is to blind the eyes of the saints too!



How Does A Stronghold Develop?

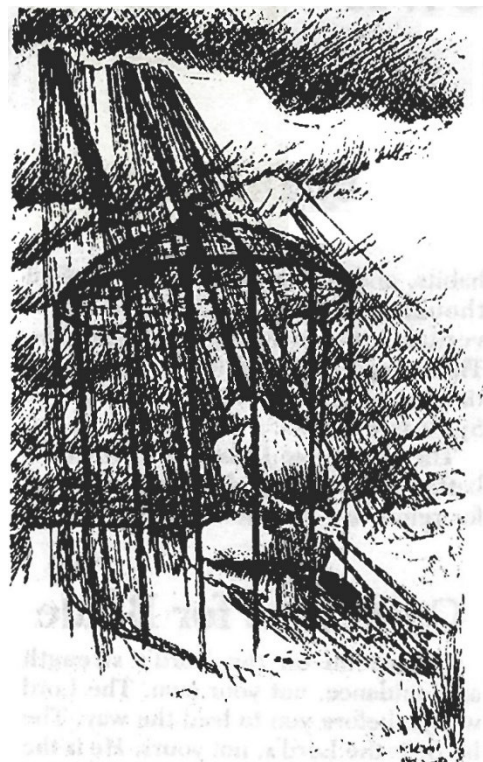
Yielding to the sins of the flesh. "... do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting (yielding) the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God... Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey...?" (Romans 6:12-13, 16)

Do you get the picture here of a Christian "slave"? There is no intimation that if the Christian died he would not go to heaven. That legal transaction has already been effected and sealed. It is a gift to the believer. But, it is possible to become a slave to the sins of the flesh. The area in which we are a slave is the stronghold area.

The key word, as given by Paul, is "yield." "Yielding" denotes action as well as choice. In road signs, "yield" means "giving the right of way." Paul says we either yield ourselves to the flesh (Satan's way) or to God. From the very first and slightest "yield," the chains of slavery begin to materialize. Each succeeding "yield" becomes another link in the forming of a stronghold. No matter what the form of sin, we become a slave to it.

AN EXAMPLE: Put in the simplest form then, evil strongholds form because of *yielding to sin*. Take Sam for example, a young man in his mid-thirties, who came in for counseling. He had been a Christian since his teen years and had even been called to preach the gospel. Yet there was an uncontrollable lust in his life. He shared that on the average of twice a month he would drive to a nearby city, go to a massage parlor and have intimate relations. He would not want to! He might have just spent two hours in prayer and Bible study, and then would get up off his knees and drive to the massage parlor. The stronghold of lust oftentimes controlled Sam's actions.

In Sam's life this lust was not always so great. It took hold a little at a time. When he was just seven or eight, he had his first encounter with sex. Out of *curiosity* he and a young girl touched and explored each other. Lust was aroused in him at that early age. It was sweet and felt good. He found someone who thought he was special. He received her approval. A cycle began to form in his life. This cycle is an important principle which explains the development of most strongholds.





THE STRONGHOLD CYCLE: Thoughts lead to emotions which lead to actions which lead to habits which lead to a stronghold (a way of life).

Sam began to think about his experience. He yielded his mind to these thoughts and desires. The door for the stronghold of lust had been opened. The more he thought about the opposite sex, the stronger his feelings became. He began to take action by looking at "girlie" magazines and reading stories of sexual conquests. As the thoughts and actions ran unchecked, lustful habit patterns began to form in his life. These habit patterns became "links in the chain" of the stronghold which enslaved him. Masturbation and pornography became a way of life and he couldn't seem to help himself. These reinforced the lustful pattern of thinking. To make matters worse, girls seemed to be attracted to Sam. They would literally throw themselves at him. The longer he lived, the stronger the bondage became. "His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin." (Proverbs 5:22 NAS)

FORMATION OF SUPPORTIVE STRONGHOLDS: The devil's strategy is to form several strongholds that will support on another. Look at diagram number one for an example of how supportive strongholds are developed.

Sam could never get moral victory over the lust until he understood why he was lusting. He did not lust primarily for the sexual pleasure it brought him, but because he was getting temporary acceptance and love from these relationships.

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32 NAS) Free from what? Sam began to be set free from sin's power when he saw his real motives for lust. Out of a drive of insecurity based upon a lack of love and the need of being needed, the acceptance and love he received was an effort to make up for the lack of acceptance and security in his early family life. Deception, fear, hate, and guilt came along to confuse, compound, and reinforce the problem.

Steps In Tearing Down the Strongholds

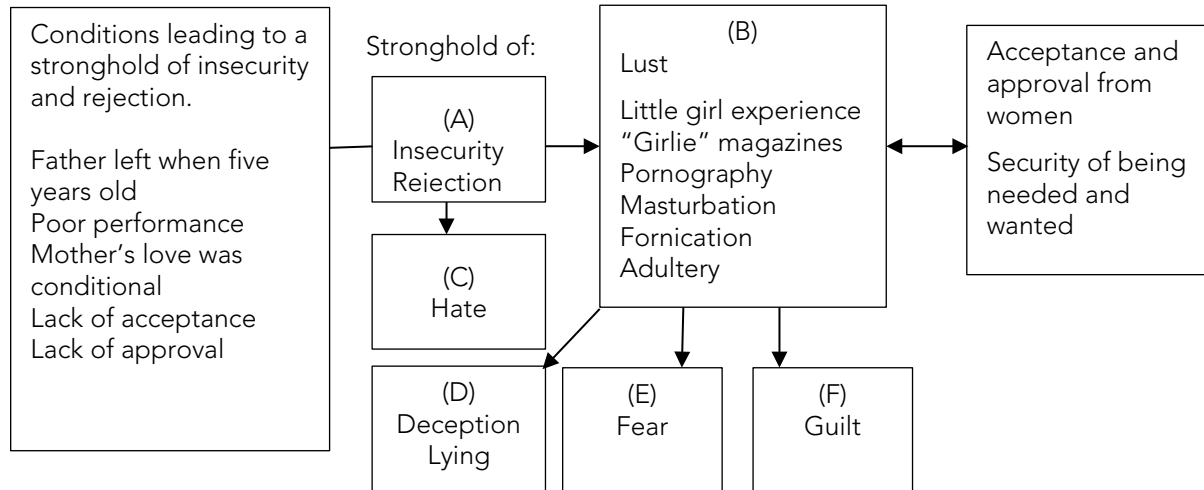
1. ***Be sure you are a Christian.*** The assurance of this as a foundation will save many futile hours of effort in trying to remove strongholds in the energy of the flesh. Make Christ the Lord of every area in your life.

2. ***Realize that only God in His power can remove strongholds!*** Our part is to yield to Him and to follow His ways. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NAS) "Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; the snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth." (Psalm 124:7-8 NAS)

God must see that we mean business. As a part of breaking the bondage, we need to humble our soul by fasting. Some strongholds will not be torn down except by prayer and fasting. When we do without something we love, that is legitimate like food or sleep, then God sees that we mean business. Ask others to join you in prayer and fasting.



Development of Supportive Strongholds (Diagram #1)



Each rectangle became a stronghold, a satanic fortress, designed to keep Sam imprisoned. As you study the diagram, you will notice how lust (B), once it was started, began to be motivated and encouraged by insecurity and rejection (A). Because Sam felt unloved and rejected by his parents, he sought various relationships with women to gain their acceptance, security, and approval. This insecurity fed his lustful actions. Other strongholds formed around this lust and insecurity: *Hate* (C) — He hated his father who left him and he hated his mother whom he could never please. *Deception and Lying* (D) — Because everyone else was lusting, it must be all right. He deceived others by hiding what he was doing. He lied to cover up his lifestyle. *Fear* (E) — He was afraid of being found out and exposed. He had a fear of being rejected and being a failure. *Guilt* (F) — Deep down he knew he was wrong, he would confess and then sin again. This pattern repeated itself over and over again, reinforcing failure, self-hate, inferiority, insecurity, and self-rejection.

3. **Identify the strongholds.** Ask God to reveal what strongholds are in your life. In Sam's case, they were lust, in-security, fear, rejection, hate, guilt, and deception. Seek Godly counsel. Share your heart and let someone pray through this with you. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one another, that ye may be healed..." (James 5:16)

There are some types of strongholds that a person excuses: "Well, that's just me and nothing can be done about it." Not so! God desires His fruits (life) to be produced in every area of our life, and that the fruits of the flesh (which can become strongholds) be eliminated.



Some of the more common stronghold groupings are listed below.

Bitterness

Resentment
Hate
Unforgiveness
Violence
Anger
Murder

Insecurity

Inferiority
Inadequacy
Timidity
Shyness

Infirmity

Addiction & compulsions
Nicotine
Alcoholism

Rebellion

Self-will
Stubbornness
Strife
Argumentation
Contention

Depression

Despair

Self-pity
Loneliness
Suicide
Death
Heaviness

Sexual Impurity

Lust
Masturbation
Homosexuality
Adultery

Drug involvement

Gluttony
Rock music

Fears (all kinds)

Phobias
Rejection
Self-rejection
Failure
Fear of man
Fear of not measuring up
Indecision
Perfectionism

Pride

Ego

Vanity
Self-righteousness
Self-centeredness

Doubt

Unbelief
Skepticism

Fornication
Frigidity
Lesbianism

Deceit

Lying
Self-deception
Fantasizing
Pretense
Guilt
Self-condemnation
Shame
Unworthiness

Occult

Ouija board
Palmistry
Astrology
Witchcraft
Seets

There is a more complete listing and description of strongholds in the book *Pigs In The Parlor* by Frank Hammond (See the recommended resources listed at the end of this article.)

4. Identify *and confess specific sins as they relate to the stronghold area*. As in Sam's life, he had to go back to the time he was eight years old when he had that experience with the young girl. Be specific. It is not enough to say, "God forgive me for all my sin," or even, "...all my lust." But, rather say, "God forgive me for that lustful experience I yielded to when I was eight years old." Confess your sins one at a time and then forget them. God does! "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 NAS)



Repent and mourn over your sin (James 4:9), for it has grieved God. "... God, against thee and thee alone have I sinned ..." (Psalm 51:1-13) See also Proverbs 28:13 and Romans 8:1.

Don't rationalize your sin, just confess it. It is important to write out this confession, so when the devil brings it to mind later on, you can remember it has already been confessed. Don't worry about those sins that are not brought to your mind; it is God's work to reveal your sin.

The questions arise, "Should I confess sins that happened prior to my becoming a Christian? Haven't they already been forgiven? Praise the Lord! This is so! However, the strongholds of sin residing in the soul still remain. Those habit patterns of a lying tongue or lustful eye, for instance, have not been changed or replaced. The sins have been forgiven, but the cleansing and renewing of the mind and emotions is a process that takes place as we walk in the light, that is, as we follow God's will in that area where we were once rebellious. (I John 1:7) The mind is a computer that records all of our experiences. The enemy, who knows us better than we know ourselves, uses the mind to accuse us of the past and touches the emotions of the past to influence our present feelings. Understanding this, as we confess our sins to God (agree with Him that those were sins), and repent of them (acknowledge our single-mindedness of purpose to follow God in that sin area), then the mind and the emotions (conscious and subconscious) begin their cleansing and renewal process.

Sam might pray, "God, I agree with you that my lustful experience when I was eight years old was wrong, and I thank you for forgiving me on Calvary. I will not let this be a part of my life any longer." Any time the devil should try to bring this experience back to Sam's mind, he can just say, "Thank you, Lord, for forgiveness and cleansing, and Satan, in the name of Jesus, take your accusing thoughts and go."

The sins (of the Christian) have been forgiven, but the cleansing and renewing of the mind and emotion is a process that takes place as we walk in the light.

5. *Thank and praise God for His faithfulness to forgive sin and to cleanse from guilt.* (I John 1:7,9) He removed our sin as far from us as the east is from the west. (Psalm 103:12) "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand." (Psalm 149:6 NAS) Satan, can't stay around praise. Negative thoughts and forces flee when we begin to praise God. Then pray, "Lord, I forgive myself and will no longer condemn and put myself down for the sins and mistakes of the past."

6. *Visualize in your mind's eye the destruction of the stronghold.* Visualize a giant bulldozer crashing against that fortress, that castle, that stronghold. See Christ at the controls of the bulldozer, rejoicing and having the best time pulling down the walls. Visualize the negative forces scurrying out — running for their lives for they can't stand



the presence of Jesus. Remember that the Jesus Who lives within you is greater than those forces of the world. (1 John 4:4) Now look — the walls are demolished. See that bulldozer pushing the debris over the cliff, leveling that ground, clearing it to be replaced by a beautiful building made with God's hands.

7. *Ask Jesus to set you free from all the negative forces associated with the stronghold.* For example: inferiority, insecurity, lust, hate, guilt, etc. Command every force to leave in Jesus' name. Satan and his forces were defeated by Christ on the cross. After all legal rights to a person have been taken back through confession of sin, then the negative forces must leave upon command (Revelation 12:11; Colossians 2:13-15; Luke 10:17-19; John 17:15). Renounce, in the name of Jesus, all the forces Satan has sent against you.

8. *Make restitution when it is needed.* Ask forgiveness of those you have wronged, hated, from whom you've stolen, etc. It is important to forgive all sins and hurts committed against you. You are responsible for any wrong responses you made when sinned against. Don't blame anyone else. Accept full responsibility for your responses.

Sam, for instance, had to ask God to forgive him for hating his father for leaving him when he was only five years old. What that father did was wrong and unjustifiable, but Sam's responses were sinful and equally destructive.

Sam can make things right through these steps:

1. "God, I forgive my dad for his sin of rejecting Mom and me. I will not hold it against him any longer."
2. "God, forgive me for reacting in bitterness and hate toward my father's desertion. This hate hurts you and I'm sorry."
3. Then, Sam must go to his father and ask forgiveness. This will be the hardest hurdle. "Dad, I love you. I really do. I'm getting my life right with God, and He's shown me that my attitude toward you hasn't been loving and uplifting. I've been bitter and resentful over the past and this is wrong. Will you forgive me?" There is no need to detail the past, nor should you justify any of your attitudes or actions. Even if the apology is not received by the father. God is pleased. As restitution is done prayerfully, God can do a mighty work in all persons involved.





Steps In Rebuilding the Stronghold Area

It isn't enough just to expose a stronghold and tear it down. Exodus 23:30 tells us to take possession of the land and be fruitful in it. For example, where there was once the fruit of hate coming out of one's life, now the fruit of love will flow. Where there was lust and moral impurity, now holy and pure thoughts and actions flow. It is not enough to remove the stones, sticks, and weeds from the garden. We now must plant a crop.

1. *Maintain a proper attitude toward sin. Be finished with sin — every bit of it.* Treat it like you would cancer — like a rattlesnake that will kill you! "Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house." (Proverbs 5:8 NAS) Avoid the very appearance of evil. Break off those relationship that would have a detrimental effect upon you. From our illustration, Sam could no longer go to the massage parlors, and must destroy all books, magazines, and records that reminded him of the old life. Even suggestive movies and TV programs had to go.

It is sad but true, that many people are sick of the effects of sin upon their lives, rather than of the sin itself. They don't like being unhappy, depressed, sick, and confused. Therefore, they appear to want help. But, if those symptoms were removed, they would go right back into the sin. We must be sick and tired of sin and how it hurts God and separates us from Him and how it hurts other people.

2. *Completely surrender your body as a holy and living sacrifice to God.* (Romans 12:1 and Romans 6:11-13) Go through every part of your body (mind, tongue, ears, sex organs, etc.) plus every part of your life (finances, work, relationships, your ministry, children, etc.) and present them to God. "God, I give you my mind. No longer will I dwell on lust and allow it to fill my mind." Sam had to make a covenant with his eyes, to look only upon a woman's face.

3. *Reckon the old flesh nature powerless and to no effect, because it was crucified with Christ on the cross.* (Romans 6:6,11) Pray, "I claim for myself the full deliverance accomplished through Christ's death upon the cross." State and affirm this position. This truth learned and applied to the heart is a must! In fact, if everything that is suggested in this article is done, yet this is slighted, the results will prove meager and incomplete. We must know who we are in Christ, and what Christ did to that old sin nature from which comes the lusts of the flesh. (Read Handbook To Happiness by Dr. Charles R. Solomon, listed in the recommended resources at the end of this article, for further light on this point.)

4. *Do scriptural studies.* Study the specific aspect of God's character that the stronghold has violated.

Stronghold

Moral Impurity
Hate, revenge
Pride

Fear, worry, unbelief

Deception
Guilt

God's Character

God is holy
God is love
God's knowledge, humility
God is faithful
God is love
God is truth
God is merciful and forgiving



The book, *Knowing God*, by J. I. Packer (listed in the recommended resources at the end of this article), is a great help in this study. Every sin is a violation of the character of God and the reason man sins is that he has not sufficiently met God in that particular area of His character. It will not be (enough just to study; God's Word must permeate your mind and being. Ask God for revelation. Rather than lust, insecurity, and deception controlling our friend Sam, now God's holiness, truth, and complete love and acceptance has taken its place. God's truth, God's way, God's thinking, God's righteousness are so much more fulfilling and powerful.

5. *Lay aside the old self and put on the new self.* In effecting a change in lifestyle, through God's power we must put off old sinful habit patterns and replace them with new godly ones. If the replacing is not done, then a return to the former manner of life is much easier. When you are tired, sick, or under great pressure, all the good resolves will not last. For example, Sam had allowed lying to become a part of his life. Lying must be replaced by his becoming a truth-teller in every situation, even on the slightest details. Until truth replaces lying, he will remain vulnerable to sinful reversion. New truth patterns of response must become dominant.

Put off

Lying
Judging, pride

Bitterness

Unforgiving spirit
Selfishness
Bad language

Put on

Truth telling
Humility, searching my own sin
Tenderheartedness
Forgiving spirit

Death to self
Edifying language

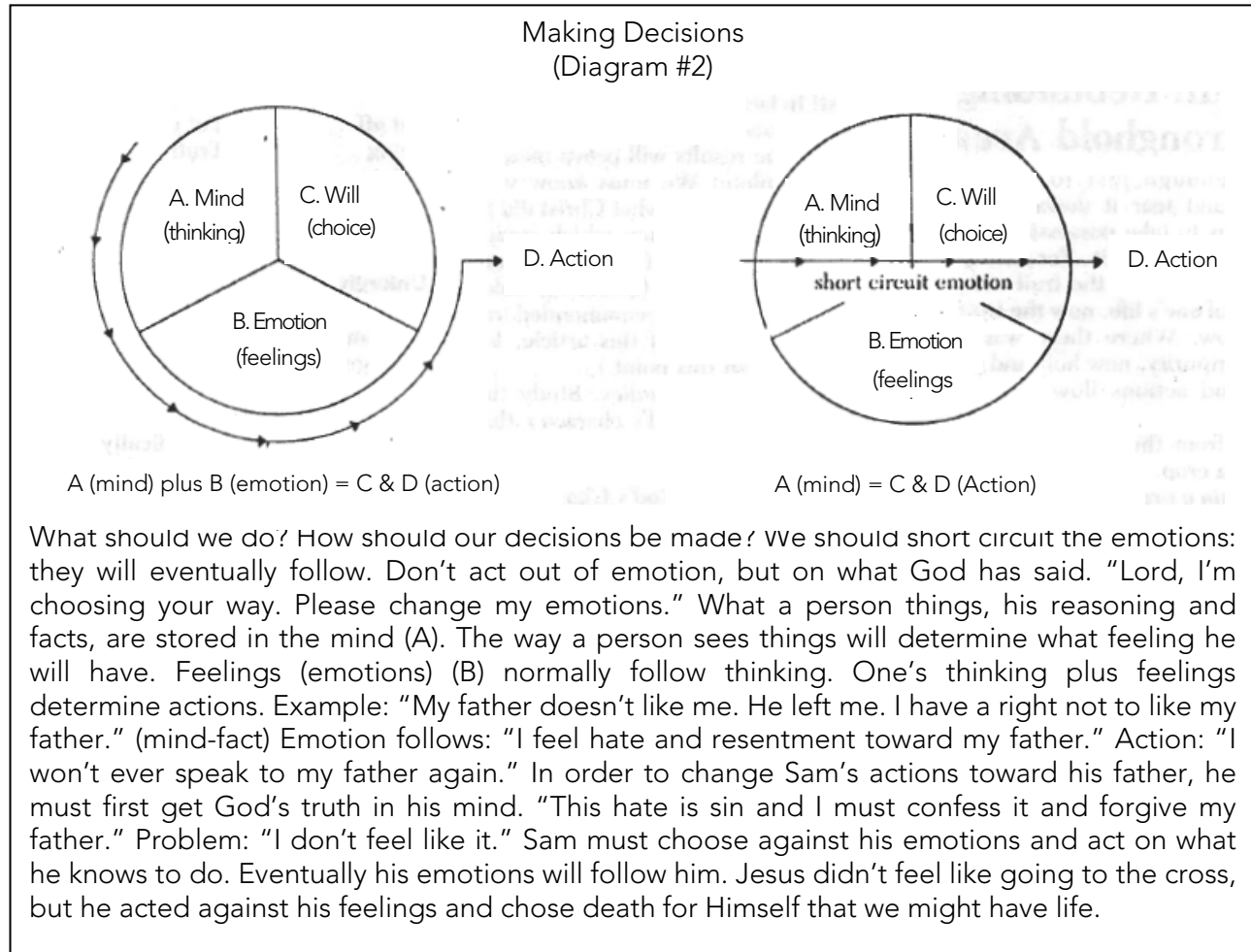
We must memorize and meditate on scripture related specifically to the stronghold area. For example, if there was a stronghold of hate, study and memorize and meditate upon scripture related to the consequences of hate and bitterness, plus forgiveness, mercy and God's love.

Remember this important point: It is Christ in you who is your hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27) It is the life of Christ that you must draw upon to put off and to put on. If the renewing is done in your own strength, then God's life will not be produced. Call on God to reproduce Himself in these areas. "God, I can't change. I can't do this by my own will power. You come in and be my strength to change. I'm dependent upon you." This is an attitude God will honor.

6. *Control your emotions.* Most persons do not act primarily upon what they know, but how they feel. "I know I should forgive him, but I don't feel like it." This is a good example of how many people make choices of action. Because I don't feel like getting up for my quiet time. I sleep in the morning. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. As a person begins to walk consistently in the Spirit, his life will become more disciplined.



Look at diagram number two and the explanation accompanying it to better understand the decision making process.



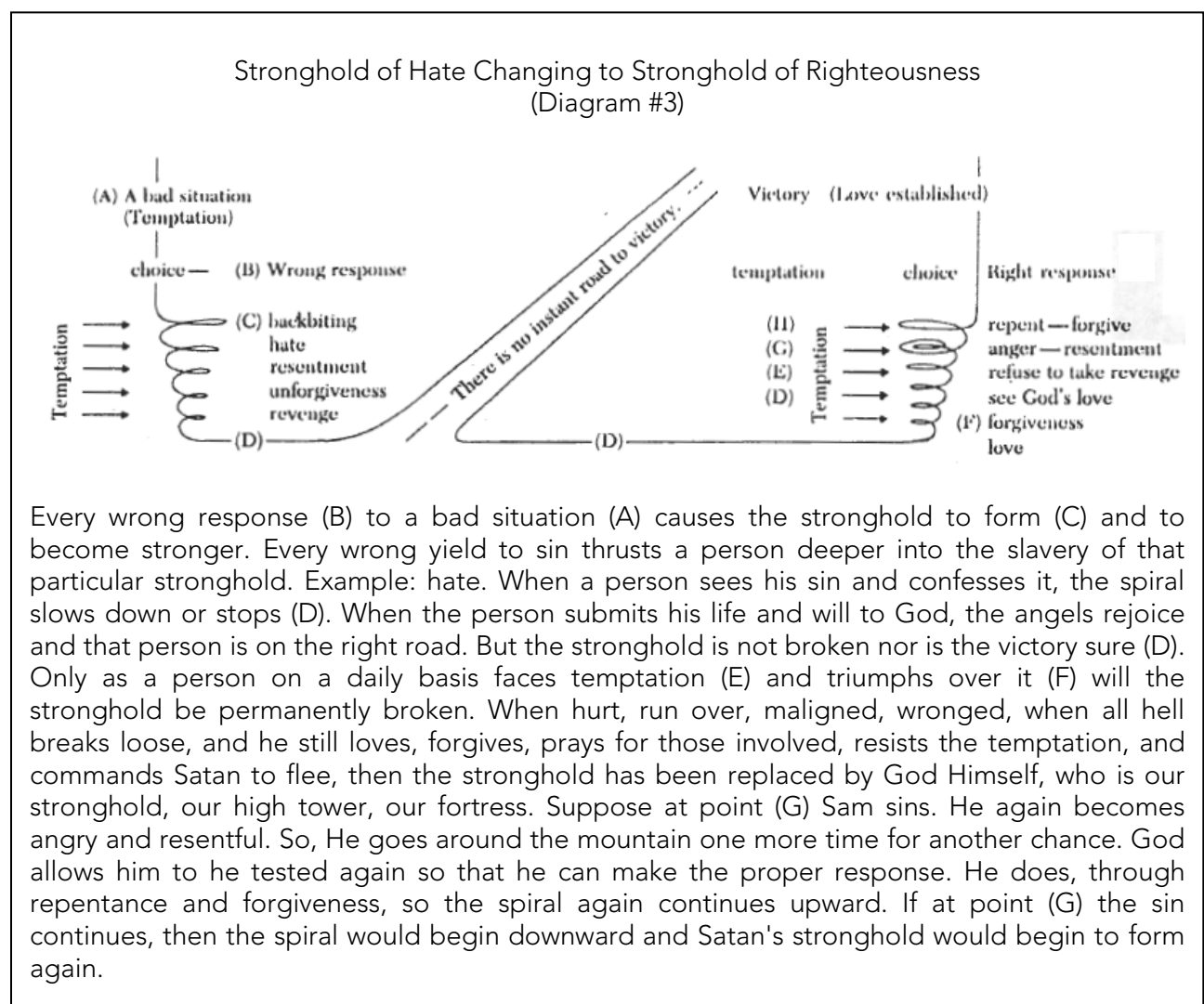
7. *Control your mind.* The mind becomes the battlefield. Remember that Satan can shoot fiery darts into the mind, but we don't have to receive them. As a thought of lust comes, shoot back a scripture. One might be "Be ye holy as I am holy." Thoughts are much like an airplane looking for a place to land. If you don't give them a landing strip, they finally will run out of gas and crash. "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7 NAS) Command the thoughts away in Jesus' name and praise Him for the new beautiful thoughts and life that God is beginning to build in you.

8. *Pray for the Holy Spirit to fill and cleanse the former stronghold.* It is not by our might or power, but by God's Spirit. (Zechariah 4:6) Following a little formula that someone has written or trying hard and being sincere just isn't enough to destroy Satan's stronghold. According to Ephesian 5:18 we are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jack Taylor's book, *The Key to Triumphant Living*, is an excellent study dealing with both self-life and the filling of the Holy Spirit. (See the recommended resources listed at the end of this article.)



Ask Christ to heal your mind and emotions as they relate to his former sin area. Claim I Peter 2:24 — that by the wounds of Christ on the cross you are healed. A study on inner healing may be helpful to those suffering from deep mental and emotional scars. The book, *Inner Healing Through Healing of Memories*, by Betty Tapscott, is a recommended example for such a study. (See the recommended resources at the end of this article.)

9. *Keep your sins confessed up to date.* If sin recurs, confess it immediately. Find out what conditions led to your falling into the sin. "He who confesses and forsakes...will find compassion." (Proverbs 28:13 NAS) "The Lord also will be a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." (Psalm 9:9 NAS) "Because of His strength, I will watch for Thee, for God is my stronghold." (Psalm 59:9 NAS) "O my strength, I will sing praises to Thee; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me loving-kindness.) (Psalm 59:17 NAS)





10. *Remember: Inch by inch — it's a cinch.* Remember, God told Joshua that he would take the land little by little. In fact, it took over seven years, and even then not all of the enemies were driven out because of Israel's disobedience.

Diagram number three may be helpful in understanding this principle. Strongholds develop over a period of time. Seldom does God come into a person's life and rid him of all problems, bad habits, and besetting sins all at once.

Temptation demands a choice. As we yield to sin and flesh, a stronghold of sin develops. As we yield to God following a temptation, then a stronghold of righteousness is built into our lives, and the fruits of the Spirit have an opportunity for clear expression. Temptation followed by a right choice result in godliness.

Can you see God's plan? First, we identify those strongholds in our life that keep us from being like God. Then we tear them down by taking away their right to be there. Finally, we establish God and His life as our stronghold in that very area where Satan once ruled.

"But whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away... But... we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:16,18 NAS)

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

Pigs In The Parlor (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Books, Inc., 1973) by Frank Hammond. Available from your local Christian book store. \$3.50)

Handbook to Happiness (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1971) by Dr. Charles R. Solomon. Available from your local Christian book store or from Cross-Life Expression, 1455 Amonino, Denver, CO 80215. \$3.95 plus shipping and handling charges.

Knowing God (Madison: InterVarsity Press, 1973) by J. I. Packer. Available from your local Christian book store. \$7.95 and \$3.95.

Key to Triumphant Living (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971) by Jack R. Taylor. Available from your local Christian book store or from Dimensions in Christian Living, P.O. Box 6369, Fort Worth, TX 76115. \$5.95 and \$2.25 plus shipping and handling charges.

Inner Healing Through Healing of Memories (Houston: Hunter Ministries, 1975) by Betty Tapscott. Available from your local Christian book store or from Hunter Ministries, P.O. Box 19827, Houston, TX 77024.

