



Breaking Down
Strongholds

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Breaking Down Strongholds

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” – (attributed to) Albert Einstein

Sad Effect

Whether you call it the ball and chain, the merry-go-round, or simply call it by the Bible name, Strongholds make all of us to repeat over-and-over the exact same behaviors that keep us down. Addictions, or what the Bible calls entanglements and besetting sins, often times show up as visible (or even invisible) evidence of Strongholds. Before going any further, though, we better clear the air and face facts: According to the Bible, every living person on the face of the Earth disobeys God (called “sin” in Romans 3:23ⁱ), deals with the sin that so easily makes us stumble (Hebrews 12:1ⁱⁱ), and struggles with weak flesh (Romans 8:3ⁱⁱⁱ). The bad news is that the Bible certainly includes you in that number with the rest of us, and while it is not “good” news, perhaps it helps a little to know that you do not face these things alone. In fact, the Bible even tells us that there is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9^{iv}). Thinking on these things honestly forces us to admit that our society and culture fall far short of ideal even in man’s eyes, but also absolutely in God’s eyes (Romans 3:12^v). No questions really exist here.

The question centers instead on how to *stop* doing the things we know displease God and destroy our lives. The world might steer the one asking that question to self-help books, however, these fill the bookstores to the brim without any lasting results. With so many “experts” applying so much effort to the subject of self-help, surely by this point in history humanity would all live healthy, wealthy, and wise! Yet, the evening paper seems to prove such a conclusion incorrect.

God provides us the key in His Word. All the self-betterment programs man has created throughout history without exception misses this one key fact. That is, simply stated, we must not just deal with the sin. We must also deal with how we *think* about the sin.

Proverbs 23:7a

“For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he”

Regardless of whether a person knows the Lord Jesus Christ in Salvation or not, this fact remains true. It is just as true for the worst human who ever lived as for the dear church-lady grandmother never known to speak a word in anger. It is true for you and for me.

Strongholds Explained

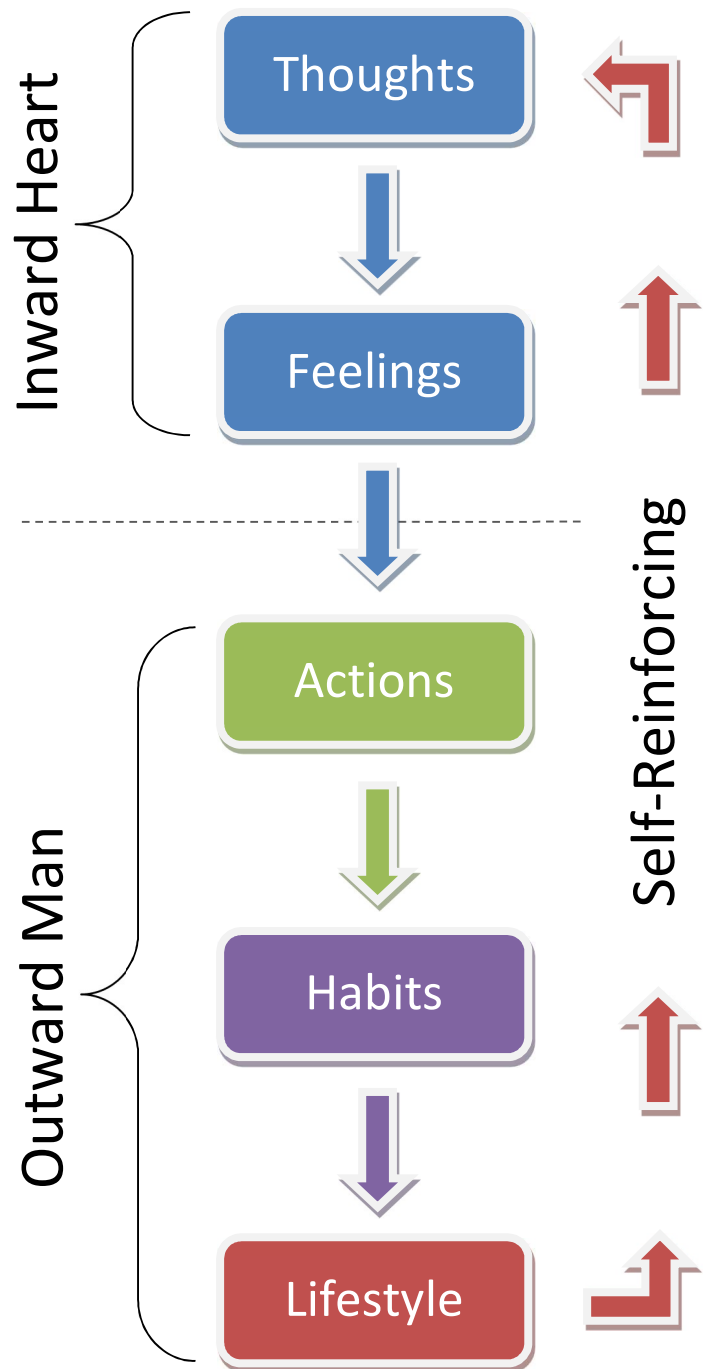
Like a mediaeval castle, a spiritual stronghold can turn back all but the most determined assaults. However, also like a mediaeval castle, the right ally makes all the difference. The stronghold can be broken!

The Bible says that as a man “thinketh” in his heart, or the inward man, so is he (Proverbs 23:7a^{vi}). In other words, change the thoughts to change the man—easy to say, but impossible to accomplish.

Examine the diagram on this page and notice that the red arrows move in a circular flow. That Reinforcing behavior works just like enemy reinforcements on a battlefield—just when you think you have made some headway, you find yourself back at square one. This alone makes the stronghold impossible to breakdown in the power of the flesh. Some can change a lifestyle by significant effort. Fewer still can break a habit by will power alone. A handful might change their actions with a continual act of supreme self-discipline, and still be doomed to stumble again because they cannot win freedom from their thoughts and feelings.

It works like this: The thoughts a person thinks drives feelings. The feelings will eventually come out as actions. The actions, when repeated enough become habits. A collection of habits creates a lifestyle, and a lifestyle constrains the mind to think the same reinforcing thoughts. The inward man, or the Heart, eventually displays itself to the outside world.

Just like the Bible says (Proverbs 23:7a).



Simple Example

Al meets Bob one day at church. They have known each other for years and have passed many pleasant conversations together. Today, though, when Al sticks out his hand in greeting, Bob shoulders by without even noticing. He did not pause to speak. In fact, it did not seem like Bob even noticed Al existed.

Now Al begins thinking (remember the diagram): *Why did Bob treat me that way? After all, we've never been the best of friends, but surely, I deserves more than a snub on a Sunday morning. Maybe my car isn't quite as new as Bob's or I don't live in as nice a neighborhood, but this is church! I have been a member here a lot longer than Bob and all his pals. I don't think he ever liked me.*

Soon Al's thoughts become feelings. *He says in his heart: You know, I don't like Bob that much. In fact, I am not sure if I ever liked him. Actually, I may really hate him.*

We can see how the little story progresses from here. Now Al moves into the world of actions. *If he's going to treat me like that, then I'll do the same to him.* Since he feels hatred towards Bob, Al will now begin to avoid him. Those actions become habits, which in turn soon simply becomes a way of life. Al's lifestyle reinforces his thoughts. Now, regardless of what Bob says or does, to Al or anyone else for that matter, Al's mind turns Bob's behavior into a personal attack, which gives him even more reason to hate, and so forth and so on. Al has become a very bitter man.

Now, we will consider this same silly scene played out differently. What if Bob turned around, rushed back to Al, and said, "Al, I'm sorry! I shouldn't have pushed past you, but I just got a call—my mother is going into the hospital." So, why did Al jump to the worst possible conclusion?

Sources Examined

We see the power of thoughts. We see how the things we think affects the person we are. So far, though, we have yet to examine the source of those thoughts. Two, and only two, sources for our thoughts exist. One source is the Mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16^{vii}), for the purposes of His goodness (Psalm 100:5^{viii}), grace, mercy, and love (Ephesians 2:4&5^{ix}). The other source is the power of evil, which goes by the Biblical names the Flesh, the Devil, and the World (Ephesians 2:2&3^x).





No Relationship with God

of God. The lack of a relationship with God means no knowledge of the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore, you have no other source for your thinking other than, as the Bible in one case says, “only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5^{xii}).

Some might reject this idea. They might believe that they create original thoughts all the time, but the Bible talks about this—let us redirect our attention to Ecclesiastes 1:9. The Bible tells us that there is *nothing new under the sun*, which includes our thoughts.

Plainly put, the Bible teaches us to do right things. From God’s Word, a person can learn to live a life that society would call “moral.” However, living an outwardly “moral” life will not provide true freedom from a stronghold. Furthermore, the Bible explains that without the relationship with Jesus Christ called Salvation, a person cannot even please God (Romans 8:8^{xiii}). Therefore, an individual without God might occasionally do the “right” things but cannot do them for the “right” reasons.

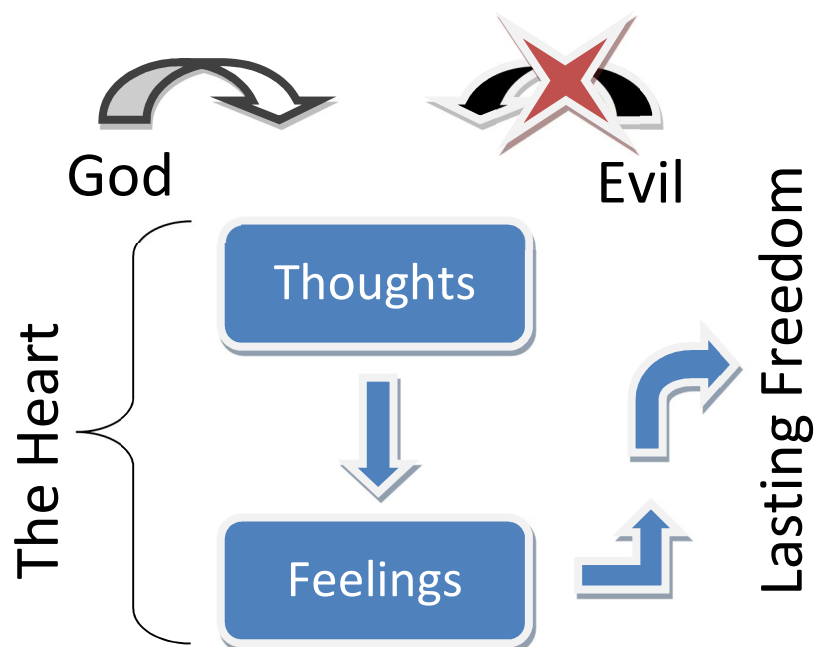
This situation utterly *prevents* breaking down spiritual strongholds. The “natural” man without a relationship with God cannot receive the things of God (I Corinthians 2:14^{xiv}). In fact, the Bible says that the lack of understanding runs so deep that the mind with no relationship considers the things of God foolishness!

On the other hand, a person who has what the Bible calls Salvation possesses a new source for thinking godly thoughts, and that by walking close to Him, the influence of the powers of Evil becomes minimized. That person no longer enters the battle unarmed, but instead ready to fight and win (II Corinthians 10:4^{xv}).

As we continue, you need to know that here is the catch. Without a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ, you cannot know the Mind of Christ in your life. The Bible makes this distinction clear by explaining how we know about the things of man. We know the things of man because we have the spirit of man in us (I Corinthians 2:11^{xi}). That verse goes on to tell us that we can know the things of God by the Spirit

II Corinthians 10:4

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds”



Success Experienced

As a person walks with God, and learns from His Word, the reinforcing power of the stronghold is removed. As each imagination and “every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” is cast down, the way of escape appears. As every thought is brought in captivity to the obedience of Christ, a person leaves the ball-and-chain behind and walks without entanglement as a “New Creature” in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17^{xvi}). “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

Just like the Bible says (Proverbs 23:7a).

Teaching this simple fact makes the H.O.P.E. International Addictions Recovery Program different. We believe in freedom from addictions and entanglements. We do not preach that anyone in this life can reach sinless perfection, but with the power of God, we can certainly “sin less”. He is mighty to tear down strongholds in the lives of hurting and hopeless people, but we have to let Him. We have to do what He says, because He knows how to make our lives work.

H.O.P.E. Bible Truth #1

Only God knows How to Make Life Work

We believe that without Christ, one may only be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2^{xvii}). We also know by personal experience that only by the transformation found in Jesus Christ may we renew our minds.

This is the key. Will you unlock your life?

Notes

Evangelist Richard King (Berean Baptist Church, Springfield, Missouri) preached a message based upon this subject at the Berean H.O.P.E. Attendees in June of 2012.

ⁱ Romans 3:23 – For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 12:1 – Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 8:3 – For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

^{iv} Ecclesiastes 1:9 – The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

^v Romans 3:12 – They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

^{vi} Proverbs 23:7a – For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

^{vii} I Corinthians 2:16 – For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ.

^{viii} Psalm 100:5 – For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

^{ix} Ephesians 2:4&5 – But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

^x Ephesians 2:2&3 – Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: ³ Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

^{xi} I Corinthians 2:11 – For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

^{xii} Genesis 6:5 – And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

^{xiii} Romans 8:8 – So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

^{xiv} I Corinthians 2:14 – But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

^{xv} II Corinthians 10:4 – (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

^{xvi} II Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

^{xvii} Romans 12:2 – And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

H.O.P.E.

Helping Others Put off Entanglements