

BOOK

**Children of Fire:**  
**How to Effect Positive Lasting Change in Your Troubled Youth**

by  
Mel W. Coddington, Ph.D., M.A.B.C.

www.BelieverAssist.com

Copyrights:

Scriptures taken from Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®  
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc®  
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright © 2003, 2015, 2021 Mel W. Coddington, and permission is hereby granted that this document may be used, copied, and distributed non-commercially to non-profit organizations, individuals, churches, ministries, and schools worldwide, provided the copies are distributed at no charge and retain this sources documentation as supplied herein. This document is not for sale, resale, or for use as a gift or premium to be offered in connection with solicitations or contributions.

**Table of Contents**

List of Abbreviations, Acknowledgments, Preface	-	-	-	2
Introduction	-	-	-	2
I. Analyzing the Problem				
Chapter 1: Ineffective Modern Solution Attempts-	-	-	-	3
Chapter 2: Finding A Solution	-	-	-	8
II. Plugging In To More Power				
Chapter 3: Gaining Access to God and His Power	-	-	-	14
Chapter 4: Drawing Upon God's Power	-	-	-	19
III. Getting to the Heart of The Problem				
Chapter 5: Objectives and Influences of Strongholds	-	-	-	27
Chapter 6: Origins and Treatment of Strongholds	-	-	-	33
IV. Christ-like Parenting				
Chapter 7: Modeling Christ-likeness	-	-	-	40
Chapter 8: Interacting With Love	-	-	-	44
Chapter 9: Balanced Discipline	-	-	-	48
Chapter 10: Reconciling With Your Child	-	-	-	56
V. Facilitating Reconciliation With God				
Chapter 11: Gentle Persuasion	-	-	-	59
Chapter 12: Biblical Counseling	-	-	-	66
Appendix A: List of Strongholds	-	-	-	71
Appendix B: Quick Reference List	-	-	-	73

## List Of Abbreviations

GRK = English definition of a Greek word taken from the original Greek version of the New Testament of the Bible

HBR = English definition of a Hebrew word taken from the original Hebrew version of the Old Testament of the Bible

KJV = the King James Version translation of the Bible

NIV = the New International Version translation of the Bible

Strong's #\_\_\_\_ = Strong's reference number for the Greek words in the New Testament and the Hebrew words in the Old Testament of the Bible

v. \_\_ = verse number

vv. \_\_ = verses numbers

## Acknowledgments

Scripture taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. (c) Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Quotations from the *King James Version Bible* and *Strong's Greek Dictionary* used by permission of Ellis Enterprises, Inc., 4205 McAuley Blvd., Suite 385, Oklahoma City, OK 73120. (c) Copyright 1988 - 1998. All Rights Reserved.

## Preface

Among the many activities I have been involved in since starting in ministry in 1992, I have naturally been drawn to ministering to troubled children, teenagers, and adults. In this regard, initially I worked with street kids, and then added ministering to incarcerated men and juveniles. Then in 1996, I (along with my wife) took a job as a live-in houseparent for troubled teenage girls in a Community II residential treatment group home facility specifically designed to teach to their serious behavior disorders, which were due mainly to sexual abuse, physical abuse, substance abuse, gang involvement, and/or abandonment. For 4 years, I researched and tested various treatment and counseling approaches and techniques to determine their effectiveness on the extreme psychological and behavioral conditions the girls in my group home exhibited. From the combined experiences of ministering to troubled youth in these various ways over the years, my three academic degrees (Doctor of Philosophy in Pastoral Ministry, Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling, Bachelor of Arts in Evangelism/Discipleship), and my 10 years of experience as a professional marriage and family Biblical counselor has come the forging of the approach and principles for this book, *Children Of Fire*, which is designed to help average parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and house parents facilitate positive lasting change in the life of their troubled youth, who has major psychological and/or behavior problems.

## Introduction

*"My kid is out of control! He does exactly what he wants and completely ignores everything I tell him. He's running me ragged and I think I'm going to have a nervous breakdown because of how my kid is behaving and what he's putting me through. I've tried everything and I'm desperate for help. I just don't*

*know what to do anymore."*

Have you been thinking this way about your child or teenager? Has your situation with your child been progressively deteriorating to the point where you feel you have lost control over him or her? Are your child's behaviors severe or destructive? Is your child or teenager putting you through the fires of frustration, anguish, hopelessness, distress, and despair?

There is a healthy way to facilitate positive lasting personality and behavior change in the life of your troubled youth. This book, *Children of Fire*, is designed to help average Christian parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and house parents accomplish this goal. Utilizing a balanced combination of evangelism, discipleship, and biblical counseling, the unique approach offered in this book provides concrete action steps for parents to implement in creating fertile conditions and environment which are favorable for their youth to sprout and grow spiritually. The key to this approach is to proceed in a manner that pleases the Lord, collaborates with Him, and is thereby conducive for Him to release His power in the life of the troubled youth. Gradually, biblical principles and truth are increasingly applied into every aspect of the youth's life, daily living, the family, and social relationships to bring about actual personality transformation.

Most approaches on this subject are theoretically written from the normal perspective and experiences of being a pastor, or a youth worker, or a clinical counselor who has significant but limited exposure to youths in turmoil. The approach in *Children of Fire* was forged from the unusual tribulation-al furnace atmosphere of a treatment group home where I, together with my wife, lived with 8-9 extremely troubled teenage girls at a time. These girls exhibited serious behavior disorders and were thereby classified as being unsuitable for living in normal homes or foster homes. In the fires of daily turmoil and distress, we were able to discover, test, and refine an approach through which dramatic personality changes were occurring in even the most hardcore of street gangbangers. Living so closely with and ministering to these group home girls for 5 years has yielded a wealth of insight about how to effect positive lasting change in troubled youths who have problems or behaviors ranging from mild to severe. Understanding also was gained from their variety of backgrounds - most of whom either: had lived on the streets; were from broken homes; had been severely neglected, abandoned, or abused by one or both of their parents; were delinquents with the law and/or school; were in juvenile detention for serious or grievous crimes; had regularly used mild and/or hard drugs; had been adopted; or were from normal, properly functioning homes. Gleaned from this environment and from 11 years of doing ministry with at-risk youths, *Children of Fire* offers a practical, workable way for parents to effectively deal with their troubled youth, even if the youth is exhibiting extreme behaviors.

There is hope for your unbearable situation with your youth. The Lord wants to transform him/her (Rom. 12:2). "In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears... he rescued me... O LORD, my strength... my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; in whom I take refuge" (from Psalm 18:6,19,1,2). *Children of Fire* will teach you how to call upon the Lord for His help and power in dealing with and changing your troubled youth.

## **Section I: Analyzing the Problem**

### Chapter 1: Ineffective Modern Solution Attempts

In this day and age, there seems to be an increasing number of children and teenagers who are uncontrollable. These youths have developed major behavior problems and have become difficult or impossible to manage. Their unpleasant dispositions are characterized by such negative qualities as being: defiant, rebellious, destructive, hurtful, anti-social, or unstable. The reasons for the development of these behavior problems vary widely and are dependent upon circumstances unique to each particular youth. Even though the origins of some behavioral problems are readily identifiable, many are interrelated and have no easily determinable source. Present behavior problems can be generated both intentionally and unintentionally by past experiences, present situations, and future anticipations. Some negative behaviors can be successfully averted by ordinary means, but many cannot.

As you know, youths with major behavior problems put their homes through fires of trials and tribulations. Everyone in the home is adversely affected by their negative attitudes and actions. Due to the complexity and concealed sources of the youths' behavior problems, parents are typically mystified as to the causes for their youths' deviant behaviors, and their efforts at getting their child to change become thwarted. The youths seem to enjoy their hurtful ways and have no apparent sufficient motivations to improve. In desperation, the parents try every credible method they can find to alleviate their youths' problems.

### **Popular Methods for Trying to Effect Change**

**REWARDS AND CONSEQUENCES:** A common approach for parents to employ in trying to bring their youths under control is to compel and coerce compliance through ample use of discipline. This discipline tends to increase in intensity to match the frequency or severity of the offense. Forced compliance through overly strong disciplining with strict authority usually backfires, leads to power struggles, and generates long-term psychological damage in the youth. Ideally, balance is sought so that not only are negative behaviors being disciplined, but positive behaviors are rewarded as well.

To accomplish this balance, a consequence system is usually devised in which specific consequences are predetermined and assigned to particular behaviors. When a child engages in a negative behavior, he earns a deterring negative consequence usually consisting of a time-out or a maintenance task such as vacuuming the living room, washing the windows, or etc. Positive behaviors are reinforced with positive rewards or benefits, such as extra sweet snacks, more television time, and etc.

Most likely you have tried this approach countless times, and have determined that this system does supply motivation for positive behaviors, but it is only temporarily effective for as long as the system is being adequately enforced. Also, you may have discovered that children with major behavior problems strive to circumvent the negative consequences and to secure additional positive rewards by manipulating the system. Moreover, even though youths are repeatedly practicing positive behaviors, their core personalities and character qualities remain unchanged. An accurate appraisal of this approach necessitates the conclusion that any apparent behavioral change is, in reality, temporary and superficial.

**APPEASEMENT:** Appeasement or giving the person what he wants is another popular approach for changing behaviors that likewise produces insufficient results. Doing such things as taking the child to an amusement park, giving him candy, or buying him a toy are incentives to change behaviors. These inducements may bring momentary peace and compliance, but this kind of appeasement also yields temporary results that lasts only as long as the youth is being given what he wants. When placation is terminated, the child will usually then go into another negative behavior to get more of what he wants. Therefore, appeasement in effect spoils the child by supplying motivation for the child to threaten further hostility and demand more placation rather than to bring about positive lasting behavior change.

As an example, suppose a mother takes her child along with her to go shopping in the grocery store. After he persistently whines for her to buy him something, she purchases him a candy bar as a motivation to change his behavior and be good - which he does on that occasion. But the next time they go to the store, the child throws a fit again if he does not again get a candy bar. If the mother holds her ground this time and refuses to buy him a candy bar, then the child goes into a louder or more destructive rage until she capitulates. Hence, the child really has not changed his behavior positively, but is instead using negative behavior as manipulation to get what he wants. So in the long-term, appeasement actually *encourages* negative behavior - not reduces it. Do your experiences with your troubled youth confirm that giving him everything he wants only encourages him to demand more?

**WILL GROW OUT OF IT:** An idealistic theory that has gained much popularity in recent years is the assumption that the youth will grow out of his negative behavior as he grows older. It is presumed that every person has innate goodness that will one day be released. Through experiencing situations in life, stimuli are activated which influence the person to make better choices for himself. As the person discovers the benefits of better choices, he will then make more correct choices until the negative behavior is eventually extinguished. So, the recommended course of action for this approach is: to be patient; encourage the child to work on his behaviors; give him plenty of time; and eventually everything

will get better as the child grows out of this phase or stage in his life. Accept him as he is and do not expect him to change until this phase has run its course.

Without a doubt many people do grow out of specific behaviors, but frequently they just change the form or implementation of the behavior. For example, if a boy consistently hits others to resolve problems, he may reshape and implement this behavior in a slightly different manner later in life by resorting to stealthily beating his wife or child as a way to express his displeasure. Even though the original behavior seemed to be extinguished at one point in time, in fact it had only gone into a short remission and then resurfaced years later in a slightly different form.

Another deficiency with this theory is all of the damage and hurt that are being done while everyone is waiting for this person to grow out of a negative behavior. There are no guarantees that change will ever occur, and years of hurt, pain, suffering, and distress may be inflicted before any relief finally does come. Furthermore, if the person likes or enjoys doing the negative behavior, then the damage may increase and intensify, with relief never coming. Waiting until a person grows out of a behavior is not practical nor beneficial. Do you want to endure more years of what your troubled youth is doing now?

**MINIMIZING:** The minimizing theory is characterized by idealistic, blind, and naive thinking that a person's major negative behavior is just a behavior and is not genuinely meant to inflict damage to others nor is it an intentional act of the will. Each hurtful behavior is simply an instinctive response over which the person has little or no ability to control, and is something he would not normally do in his right mind. Therefore, the proper response to negative behavior is to not take it personally. Bear with and endure the behavior because it is not that bad nor is it meant to hurt you specifically.

The minimizing theory is correct that negative behavior certainly is difficult or at times impossible to self-control. But this theory detaches any personal responsibility for one's actions - which is contrary to the governing, judicial, and moral systems of human society. Most negative behaviors result from intentional rational choices. The reason the person is acting upon his choices is for the purpose of deliberately inflict pain upon someone, or of getting what he wants with no regard for how it effects others. Either way though, the person should still be held responsible for his hurtful actions. Even if a hurtful action occurs as a quick natural reflex, responsibility should still be taken because this action has been conditioned as a result of an original rational cognitive choice. Minimizing negative behaviors removes personal responsibility and only provides an excuse to engage in more negative behaviors. If you minimize your daughter's shoplifting of a pair of earrings during a recent trip to the mall by telling her that she really did not mean to do it, what would you reasonably expect to her to do the next time she goes to the mall?

**JUST TALKING ABOUT IT:** A frequently effective approach for dealing with behaviors centers on interaction in which the person talks about his problems with another person. Just by talking about the problems, stress is reduced and the person is able to see the reality of the situation more clearly. As the person discovers alternative appropriate ways for handling the problem and takes ownership in good reasons why he should change, then he will incorporate these rationales into his thinking, and thereupon change as a result.

Under normal circumstances with normal people working on mild issues, this approach can accomplish the desired results of changing behaviors. However, close follow-up examination and analysis of situations involving more serious issues reveals that by just talking about one's behavioral or emotional problems usually does not eliminate their negative influences upon the person, but merely momentarily soothes the person by getting out the issues and by eliciting a sympathetic response from the listener. The problem has not necessarily been resolved completely nor has its influences been extinguished totally.

Take for an example, a discussion with a parent in which the teenager realizes good reasons for terminating a behavior. He even acknowledges agreement with the rationales. But secretly he harbors a disdain and repulsion for the corresponding choices to change his behavior. Consequently, to avoid further direct confrontation and risking exposure, he then resorts to planning and executing his behaviors in a more calculating, resourceful, cunning, deceptive, scheming, and covert manner thereafter. Just talking about the problem does not get rid of its hidden effects. Troubled youths commonly have fairly serious problems that need more than just talk to be resolved. Having spent a countless number of hours,

you can attest to the fruitlessness and inadequacy of just talking about problems with your troubled youth.

**ABUSE:** One method for changing behaviors revolves around the credible and easily verifiable assertion that some present negative behaviors have as their root a past abuse. When an abuse is perpetrated upon a person, his cognitive processes become scarred, damaged, and altered. The more the abuse is traumatic, the more the resulting behaviors are intense. The younger the person is, the more ill-equipped he is to cope and process it healthfully. [Author's note: I will discuss in more depth and incorporate aspects of this theory later in this book.] Countless numbers of sincere and dedicated people in the counseling field incorporate this theory in their counseling efforts to facilitate psychological healing from abuse. Their frontline tool is to implement the following counseling procedure of steps: 1. listen to the person describe his problem or experience, 2. validate the problem or experience, 3. provide reasoning options to cope with the problem or experience, and 4. encourage the person to move on with his life.

Even though this counseling procedure is based upon a valid theory that there is a link between present behaviors and past abuse, this procedure is nevertheless identical to the above described method of 'just talking about it'. Furthermore, it generates the same ineffective results when dealing with serious abuse issues. Just talking about a past abuse does not contain enough intrinsic power to cure all of its ongoing negative intellectual effects.

**PRETEND NOTHING EVER HAPPENED:** One of the most unthinkable approaches that some well-meaning counselors utilize is what could be called the "Pretend Nothing Ever Happened" approach. This strategy counsels the person to avoid talking about the past, leave it in the past, ignore it, stop thinking about or dwelling on it, and it will go away and not effect you anymore. Regurgitating past problems does not accomplish anything. Besides, there were probably only a few instances of abuse and any additional accounts of abuse that are disclosed are probably fabricated or significantly altered in the person's mind as a way of getting attention. So, concentrate on the present in order that better choices can be made for the future. Efforts should focus on making the person feel better about himself and feel good about life. Involve the person in plenty of activities to take his mind off the past. If the person has any ongoing problems, then he should institute a coping mechanism such as: writing in a diary; hitting his fist against a pillow; going for a walk; telling the other person how he feels; or bringing up his concern appropriately with the legitimate right to stay angry.

A motivation for counselors to use this approach is a fear of finding out details and comprehensive information about what horrific abuse actually happened to the person. There is also a justified fear that if the person starts to recount extremely traumatic events, then he may go berserk and there will be no good way to control his fit of rage once he gets started.

This counseling concern is warranted because no person has adequate power to psychologically control another person's fit of rage. Recalling a traumatic abuse frequently does incite a strong reaction from the victim, but ignoring the problem does not solve the problem. Instead, it allows the memories to continue to torment the person. The converse of having the abused person repeatedly revisit the abuse over time does not help either, because the person is not able to gradually adjust to the traumatic event due to the intensity and vividness of the memories. Furthermore, repeatedly re-living the traumatic event through the vivid memories is not only fruitless but also abusive in its own rights.

**PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATIONS:** An approach that has skyrocketed in popularity in recent years is the use of medications, which target a person's brain and thus (supposedly) affect their cognitive processes. These drugs are designed to have an altering effect on perception or behavior for the purposes of managing a serious behavior or easing its symptoms. In particular cases where a child is having severe or destructive behavior problems, adult caregivers urgently seek anything that will help bring the child under control so that he is socially safe or tolerable. Thus, psychotropic medications are employed as a 'quick fix' solution to straighten out a child's severe behavior problems. If the medications are not producing the desired results, then the natural tendency is to increase the dosage and/or add another medication.

From my 5 years of field experience observing the usage of numerous psychotropic medications on countless behavior-disordered teenagers in group homes, I have yet to see any of these medications have any positive effect other than to make the youth sleepy or drowsy. But even if evidence is ascertainable

to prove that psychotropic medications help to *manage symptoms*, they certainly do not *change behaviors* nor do they resolve the internal empowering that is driving the person to exert hurtful behaviors. In powerful dosages, psychotropic medications can mellow a person and relieve symptoms somewhat, but they do not and cannot cure non-medically-related intellectual issues, thinking processes, and choices people make.

## **Results of Modern Methods**

**CASE STUDY OF AN INSTITUTION:** At this point in our discussion of modern methods, it might be beneficial to test and consider their effectiveness in an environment where negative behaviors abound in both quantity and range of severity - such as a residential group home facility located in northern Illinois. The specific purpose of this facility is to treat behavior-disordered teenage boys and girls. I, together with my wife, were employed there as girls house parents for 4 years during the late 1990's. On this rural campus, there were 2 girls homes and 2 boys homes. The campus's maximum bed capacity was 20 boys and 20 girls, with the total population averaging about 35 youths. Because this is a treatment facility that was being paid \$175 per day per youth, there were employed approximately 30 adult staff who worked directly with the youths in the homes. The adult staff's sole function was to teach to the youths' behaviors - but not to their schooling, which was done separately in a different building by schoolteachers. The youths' length of stay on the campus ranged anywhere from a few weeks to 5 years, with the average being about 1 1/2 years. Troubled teenagers were brought there due to having committed crimes and/or being unsuitable for placement in a foster or relative's home.

The adult staff were extensively trained in handling the physical, verbal, social, and psychological aspects of serious negative behaviors. They were required to utilize a sophisticated model for behavior modification, which primarily incorporated a point system to: record behaviors; reward positive behaviors with increased privileges; and discipline negative behaviors with a loss of privileges. But, all of the popular methods for trying to effect change (as described in this chapter) were used to varying degrees. At least 60 minutes of behavior-corrective teaching were required every day for each youth. The average adult-to-youth ratio was about 1 adult on shift for every 3 youths.

The psychological treatment for each youth was conducted by 2 professional therapists and consisted of: weekly individual counseling sessions, weekly group counseling sessions; extensive use of psychotropic medications as prescribed by a psychiatrist; and crisis intervention by the therapists or psychiatric hospitals as needed. Treatment also included plentiful activity budgets, and attendance at a private on-campus Learning Disabilities / Behavior Disorders school, with staffing of about 1 teacher for every 2 youths.

From my normal observations on this campus during a 4 year period between 1996-2000, hundreds of boys and hundreds of girls went through their treatment program, but only four of them were known to be appropriately successful after leaving the program and facility. Further investigation revealed that during the 9 1/2 years prior to this period, only one other youth had become appropriately successful after leaving. The remaining 99 plus percent of the hundreds of these boys and girls who had gone through this state-of-the-art treatment facility all self-destructed after leaving, by doing such things as: running away; committing crimes; going to jail; doing drugs; engaging in prostitution or gangbanging; living on the streets or in cars; dropping out of school; being unable or unwilling to hold a job as an adult; and etc. Apparently, dismal results like this are common across the secular childcare treatment industry.

All of those four teenagers that became successful after leaving this institution came from my girls home. What distinguishes them as becoming uniquely successful is the fact that they had additionally participated voluntarily in the Bible-oriented treatment approach, which I am advocating in *Children of Fire*. All of my girls who accepted the Bible-oriented treatment approach experienced significant lasting personality change. The amount of change they experienced directly correlated to their willingness to participate in this treatment approach and the length of time they stayed in our home undergoing this treatment. A few of the girls in my home experienced little or no personality change due to: superficially participating in the Bible-oriented treatment; wavering disinterest in biblical matters; guardedness in dealing with their past; being removed from our home too quickly; and/or outright rejecting the biblical

aspects of this approach.

The obvious conclusion that can be rightly ascertained from this institution's results is that youths can be compelled to be compliant through a rigorous monitoring program, but the minute the program is removed, they revert back to being incorrigible. One of the best modern treatment programs that money can buy could not effect positive lasting change in behaviors and personality of seriously troubled youths. Compelling compliance lacks the power to change personality.

**PARENTAL BURNOUT:** Distraught and desperate parents try various modern methods for bringing change in their troubled youth, but they too achieve little or no lasting change in behaviors and personality. After long periods of time of enduring the antics of their children, the parents become perplexed, distressed, and disheartened. With the growing realization that they are essentially powerless to remedy the downward spiral, the parents succumb and give up in hopelessness and despair. Changing their youth seems an impossible task, and relief appears unattainable. Their only apparent feasible recourse is to remove the youth from their home, either by placing him in a group home or else waiting until he is old enough to survive on his own and then kicking him out of the home.

Perhaps you have reached this point of total despair. Before resorting to the extreme of removing your youth from your home, let me suggest that you take a new, fresh look at the problem from a perspective that you may not have considered in quite this way before.

## Section I: Analyzing the Problem (cont.)

### Chapter 2: Finding A Solution

Modern solution approaches to effecting change operate from humanistic presuppositions and philosophies. From the brief analyses in the previous chapter, it is apparent these humanistic approaches are virtually devoid of any theological content or perspective. The humanistic approaches presume that behaviors are solely the product of thinking; and that thinking or cognitive processes are purely a function of the mind within the brain organ. No spiritual dynamics are recognized, given credence, or taken into account. Perhaps this strikes a bull's-eye as to why modern solution approaches eventually prove to be essentially ineffective - they outright ignore humankind's spiritual component and dynamics.

Christianity has much to say about the problem of how to effect behavior and thinking change. As you will discover below, an appraisal of the problem from a biblical perspective will prove not only reasonable, but also plausible, applicable, useful, and potentially highly beneficial.

### **Appraisal of the Problem From a Biblical Perspective**

God, the supreme spiritual being in the universe, is very concerned about the thinking and actions of humans. A long time ago, He instituted a spiritual solution to humankind's negative behavioral problems and documented His solution in a book, the Holy Bible, for everyone to read and follow. God spiritually orchestrated the writing of the Bible and He designed it to specifically address humankind's thinking and behaviors, as He clearly states in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness". [Note: the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible will always be used in *Children of Fire* unless otherwise designated.] Hence, from the hand of the One who created us, we humans do have a detailed instruction book on how to deal with and change negative behaviors.

**SIN:** Contrary to popular conceptions, God identifies negative behaviors as being 'sins'. Briefly summarized, sins are anything that a person does or mentally dwells on which transgresses God's character, will, commands, decrees, or laws. Sin is failing to do the good which one knows he should be doing (Jam. 4:17). Sin causes us to miss the mark and "fall short" of God's requirements for perfect righteousness (Rom. 3:23). God says that your child, along with the rest of us, sins when he thinks or behaves inappropriately. Therefore, all negative behaviors should rightly be regarded as sins.

Sin comes naturally to us humans. We are born with a sinful nature - a natural desire to do and be sinful (Eph. 2:1-3). Our lives are characterized by "gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and



following its desires and thoughts" (v.3). As such, God determines us to be spiritually dead and unable to counter sin's adverse effects (vv.1,5). We follow sinful ways whether we want to or not. We "offer" ourselves "in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness" (Rom. 6:19). In our natural state of depravity (or moral corruption), we are not content with merely doing a few evil things. "Although [we] know God's righteous decree that those who do such [wicked] things deserve death, [we] not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32). Moreover, we "invent ways of doing evil" (Rom. 1:30). All sinful acts and our desires for them are a source of friction, conflict, and separation between God and we humans. Consequently, God gives us over to freely indulge in the sinful desires of our hearts (Rom. 1:24). Is this exposition on our propensity to do evil describing the condition of your troubled youth?

Sin is so powerful that as a whole we have no control over it nor sufficient power to completely eliminate it. We are born with an intrinsic enslavement to sin and are powerless to break its grip (Rom. 6:5-7). Most of the time, we do not care that we have insufficient control over our doing evil, because we like the evil and are busy scheming up ways to gratify our cravings for more (Eph. 2:3). As slaves to sin, we are thereby "free from the control of righteousness" (Rom. 6:20) - meaning that we humans essentially have little or no desire or compulsion to engage in righteous living and abstain from evildoing.

This brings up an interesting point to ponder: How can you as a parent justifiably expect and require your youth to engage in righteous living when he lacks innate restraint to do good and instead possesses an overpowering urge to do evil? Judging from these Bible passages such as Romans 6 and Ephesians 2, I would contend that in his current state of being, it is virtually impossible for your troubled youth to be consistently good even if he/she wants to. For various reasons, God has allowed sinful passions to overwhelm and comprehensively dominate your youth.

**BONDAGE TO SIN:** Our cultural thinking today is replete with wise-sounding remedies and recommendations to focus on positive thinking, to let one's inner goodness blossom, and to draw on one's own inherent power to successfully overcome destructive negative desires and behaviors. While being well-intentioned and yet limited in effectiveness, these remedies ignore the reality that we are entrapped in our bondage to serve sin. A key biblical passage for this concept that also fittingly summarizes the thesis, intent, and approach of *Children of Fire* is in 2 Timothy 2:19-26. Focusing here on just the end of this passage within verses 25-26:

25. "Those who oppose him [the Lord's servant (v.24)] he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26. and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."

From these verses, notice that bondage to sin is an intentional tactic of the kingdom of darkness (the devil) to take us humans "captive" (v.26). The kingdom of darkness constructs "traps" specifically designed to ensnare humans in sinful thinking and behaviors. Its purpose is to control humans and get them to do its "will" - evil (v.26). Regrettably, we humans cannot escape this trap on our own because it takes an action of God to "grant" us deliverance from the trap (v.25).

The kingdom of darkness uses lies, which are the opposite of the "truth", as a means of tricking or seducing its human prey into engaging in sin and thereby entering its trap (v.25). This deception and corresponding sinful indulgence produce a blinding or numbing effect, which displaces the human prey out of clearly thinking in our normal "senses" (v.26). Being somewhat incapacitated psychologically, we are then exploited to do evil things. Normally we would not participate in doing this evil when we are thinking clearly, have sufficient knowledge of the truth, and are free from the kingdom of darkness's influences (vv.25-26). But, we are tightly held captive by lies of the kingdom of darkness to do as it pleases.

By believing lies and by acting from an ignorance of the truth, your troubled youth has entered the kingdom of darkness' trap of depravity, and is in enslavement to doing its will. Moreover, Ephesians 2:2-3 state that the kingdom of darkness entices its prey into "following the ways of this world" through which it is actively working in the desires, thoughts, and actions of disobedient humans. Through cultural influences, your troubled youth is being manipulated as a puppet, pawn, and slave of the kingdom of

darkness. As a result, fortified enslaving "strongholds" of sin have been established to effectively control your son or daughter, who has become unmotivated and, in reality, incapable of removing the strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4).

**SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES:** As you have already learned, insisting, pleading, bribing, demanding, or forcing your troubled child to change has proven to be futile and utterly unproductive. Not only is your child powerless to control and change his bondages to sin, but you are equally powerless to convince or incite him to change. A reason that this is humanly impossible is because the strongholds have been established and fortified by supernatural spiritual power from the spiritual kingdom of darkness. Ephesians 2:2 clearly proclaims that the influence and power of the kingdom of darkness is "now at work in those who are disobedient". There is occurring in the life of your troubled youth a concentrated, intentional exertion of supernatural power to carry out destructive schemes, purposes, and activities of the kingdom of darkness (Eph. 6:11-12). Your struggles with the behaviors of your child are "not against flesh and blood" - not on a level of human against human (v.12). Rather, your struggles are on a spiritual level - a spiritual battle against the power-filled activities of the kingdom of darkness, which employs a supra-human power that supersedes or goes beyond the abilities of humans (v.12).

This would explain why your sincere and strenuous efforts to prevail over your child's behaviors have failed. You do not possess the supra-human power to subdue the spiritual activities going on in the mind of your child. If any of us had this ability, then we would successfully use it on ourselves and others to bring about complete psychological healing and utopia-like happiness to everyone. There would be no more hurting victims in this world, no more behavior-disordered children, no more juvenile delinquents, no more battered wives, no more paranoid or manic-depressive psychiatric patients, no more suicide attempts, no more revenge violence, and etc. But the reality is that neither you, nor any of us humans, intrinsically possess the type of power necessary to effectively counteract this supra-human negative power coming from the kingdom of darkness. We have been vainly using our humanistic tools when spiritual tools are required. Humanistic approaches usually do not effect positive lasting change because most of our psychological problems reside on a spiritual level, which require spiritual, supra-human power to control and subdue them.

### **Determining a Biblical Solution**

**THE OBJECTIVE:** With an accurate understanding of the true nature of the sin problem plaguing your troubled youth, you can now proceed to formulate a new strategy from the necessary spiritual perspective. In order to construct a strategy though, it is crucial to first identify the objective. Up until now, your objective most likely has been to bring about acceptable compliance and age-appropriate behaviors according to your moral standard. While being noble, this objective falls short of God's purposes. God is seeking "godly offspring" - for you to bring your child up "in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Mal. 2:15; Eph. 6:4). God desires for children to be "nurtured" and "reared up to maturity" using "disciplinary correction, warning, admonition, tutoring, education, and training" in His Word (Eph. 6:4 GRK; Strong's #1625, #3809). Unquestionably, God is prescribing spiritual training from a spiritual curriculum, the Bible, about His moral standard contained therein. Being "reared up to maturity" suggests that this is a long-term project to be consistently instituted by parents. To align with these biblical truths, your objective should now be modified to ultimately bring about age-appropriate compliance with the Word of God through long-term training from it. Remember that it is necessity for this objective to be pursued on a spiritual level rather than on a humanistic level.

Obviously your youth is nowhere near ready to accept and comply to this kind of authority in his life. Realistically, he is probably quite repulsed by religion - especially conservative evangelical Christianity. Your child's rebellion has collaborated with the kingdom of darkness to establish a stronghold of resistance to and rejection of the things of God (Heb. 3:8). Your youth has become "darkened in [his] understanding and separated from the life of God because of the [spiritual] ignorance that is in [him] due to the hardening of [his] heart. Having lost all sensitivity, [he has] given [himself] over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" (Eph. 4:18-19). Such hostility to the things of God will unquestionably present a formidable barrier to breach. But again, spiritual problems

require spiritual solutions, and because we humans lack sufficient spiritual power, the direct actions of God are required to soften your youth's heart toward the things of God.

**DIVINE POWER:** Divine power is needed not only to break down resistance and win your youth over to the things of God, but it is also needed to deliver him from the various strongholds of enslavement to sin. Divine power must be accessed in order to "demolish strongholds", reasonings, and lofty arguments "that set [themselves] up against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:4-5, NIV, GRK; Strong's #3053, #5313). Power from the Lord is required to "thwart the craving of the wicked" (Prov. 10:3). Your approach to achieving your objective will necessitate the activity of divine power in the life of your youth to correct his stubborn defective thinking and to terminate his pleasurable destructive behaviors and habits.

Your approach should also include God's intervention in the life of your child to change the direction in his life away from sinfulness and towards righteous living. God must "grant [him] repentance leading [him] to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25). God has to enlighten the mind of your child and help him to want to stop sinning (Eph. 1:18). To no avail, you have repeatedly tried to convince your wayward child to stop his negative behaviors (repent). But both the desire to repent and the actual accomplishing of repentance require the intervention of God's divine power.

**TRANSFORMATION:** Breaking down strongholds and repenting are two essential ingredients in the transformation process. God says in Romans 12:2 that there is another essential ingredient - "be transformed by the renewing of your mind". Your child's nature must be changed, molded, and remade into something new and better. This kind of personality change must come from God because we humans can be only what we are. We might be able to make minor adjustments, but to make major fundamental positive lasting personality changes that are contrary to our sinful enslavements is beyond our humanistic abilities.

In Galatians 5:22-24, God identifies that the source of transforming power for producing positive behaviors and attitudes is His Spirit:

22. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
23. gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
24. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires".

This Scripture passage does not say that these positive behaviors, attitudes, or states of mind as listed in verses 22-23 are the fruit of a good person or a devoted religious person. No, these are "fruit" - the handiwork, the produce of His Spirit working in a person who belongs to Christ. By declaring these qualities as being "the fruit of the Spirit", God is stating that we humans do not have sufficient power to manifest these qualities to their fullness as God does (v.22). Here, God is saying that it takes the working power of His Spirit to produce positive behaviors in a way that pleases Him.

This passage also pronounces that God provides those who belong to Christ with the ability to subdue, mortify, or crucify their sinful desires and passions (v.24). Galatians 5:17 explains that: "the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want". God's power is required to subdue overwhelming sinful desires, bad habits, and negative behaviors. His Spirit is actively engaged in countering sinful desires - which are too strong for us humans to control even though we may want to do right. God utilizes His power in those who belong to Christ to actively oppose the control of their negative desires, behaviors, and passions, which have the capacity to burn out-of-control like a fire within us humans.

When those who belong to Christ renew their minds in daily fellowship with God and His Word, He brings about this transformation from negative to positive behaviors and thinking. Unlike salvation, which efforts of good works can never achieve (Eph. 2:8-9), those belonging to Christ have to work with God at being transformed (or progressively sanctified). The choice to cooperate with God as He changes their personality is theirs, for God will not force them to become a new, different person. It is their choice to pursue this or not. If they do, it takes a continuous concentrated effort to "renew" their minds daily, because the instruction in Romans 12:2 is to "be" transformed.

But even in a sincere and determined desire to be transformed and to subsequently live righteously before God, by nature we humans are too weak psychologically to sustain our efforts. God has to help us

with this as well by apportioning wisdom and power through His Word, the Bible, to overthrow our foolish sinful thinking (Ps. 51:6; 1 Cor. 1:18). His words are power-filled messages and communications that purposefully target the human spiritual heart for belief and behavioral changes. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). God's words are alive right now, functioning with intelligence, guidance, wisdom, purpose, and determination. His words are not stopped by any barriers - even in extremely hardened hearts (of troubled youths). His words reach the innermost depths of our being and weigh upon our secret and guarded thinking, deliberations, desires, reasonings, and moral guidelines in order to effect change. Indeed, His words go beyond being good moral encouragement for changing behaviors, for they are a weapon of power - a spiritual sword of God's Spirit to accomplish His "good, pleasing, and perfect will" (or life plan) in our spiritual hearts (1 Cor. 1:18; Eph. 6:17; Rom. 12:2). God wields the spiritual weapon of His Word to defeat our sinful thinking.

God not only apportions power through His Word, He also grants believing humans access to this wisdom and life-changing power. He makes available has power that extends beyond our comprehension, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). In a believer His power is present, ready, and waiting to be used to establish a person's self-control over his own evil desires, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). God grants believers access to know, experience, and use "His incomparably great power" for self-control against negative desires and behaviors (Eph. 1:18-19). God wants His power to be used to achieve a fundamental positive transformational change in personality, which is characterized by a desire or motivation to pursue holy living, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Rom. 6:22). Notice that God is the only one who has this power and is able to do all of these things. The challenge for us humans is to find out how to access His power and then utilize it for the benefit of ourselves and others around us.

God-induced personality transformation is rarely an instantaneous event. A vast majority of believers experience a slow, gradual, progressive transformation that coincides with increasing spiritual maturity. This is not a charismatic experience, but an ongoing subtle activity of God's power "at work within [them]" (Eph. 3:20). The more we believing humans live in obedience to God, commune with Him, and feed upon His Word - the more our thinking, behaviors, attitudes, and personality are being transformed by His power through the renewal of our minds. This suggests that your job as parent, house parent, or foster parent is to do everything that you can to put and keep your child on the track to being transformed by God, and then faithfully staying committed while this transformation proceeds slowly.

**MOTIVATIONS:** You might be silently objecting right now that this all sounds nice, but your troubled child has absolutely no motivation to become religious, to be good, to do right, to be compliant, or to change for the better in any way. To your dismay, your youth is daily finding new ways of being defiant, rebellious, and delinquent.

Having been a houseparent for 9 incorrigible teenagers at a time, I can understand your predicament. But again, God has the answers and remedy for motivating self-centered and sin-centered persons. He is in the business of "convicting the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn. 16:8). Frequently, I have seen conviction from God serve to bring even the most hardened, defiant teenager to her senses and to motivate her to start doing what is right.

God does supply many motivators to change, one of which is the indwelling of His Spirit within a believing person's heart or personality (2 Cor. 1:21-22):

21. "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22. set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come". His Spirit comes in to live within the body and spiritual heart of the believing person (v.22). A function of His Spirit is to assist the believer in persevering or standing firm in the faith (v.21).

God's Spirit also influences behavioral and attitude changes by counseling, teaching, and reminding the believer how to properly think and act according to God's standards. Before Jesus left this earth to return to heaven, he told his disciples (Jn. 14:16-17,26):

16. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - 17.

the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 26. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you".

God's Spirit is actively and continuously consoling, influencing, and persuading the believer's thinking in order to facilitate change (v.26, GRK; Strong's #3875). Note that unlike the kingdom of darkness that forces compliance (2 Tim. 2:26), God's Spirit gently persuades compliance.

God supplies another motivator to change in that He uses His power in a believing person's life to give that person a new orientation, making him into a new creation spiritually. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). The original orientation of the person changes to become something significantly different and new through the Spirit's regenerating work in the life of the person. The person's whole attitude, direction, and propensity to do evil are shifted away from evil and redirected towards righteousness. Instead of desiring or succumbing to evil ways, the person now has a new God-given desire and ability to do what is right. God has provided the person with a new inclination and capacity to behave positively. He plants within believers a new desire to be good and to do right.

For everyone who belongs to Christ, God also provides a compelling future reason to change behaviors. He promises to one day reward those who have worked for or served Him. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23-24). Unquestionably, being motivated to live-out positive attitudes and actions in the hope of a future reward does take considerable faith to believe that God will one day keep His promise. It also takes wisdom to prepare now for what is expected in the future. Nevertheless, this is a valid motivator and can be quite compelling to youths when taught sufficiently.

**PARENT'S INFLUENCE:** As you may have surmised by now, conditions of the entire situation regarding your troubled youth can greatly affect the magnitude of God's working in his life. Conditions can either hinder or facilitate God's activities. As the parent, God has given you authority to exert premier influence over the conditions in your home and substantial influence over other conditions in the life of your youth. Maximizing your influence to create fertile spiritual conditions can lead to profound results in delivering your child from sinful ways.

Even though He does not need to, God uses humans to help bring deliverance to other humans. Take for example the biblical account in Luke 5:17-26 of some men who were carrying a paralytic man on a mat to Jesus for healing. They could not get through the crowds into the house where Jesus was, so they lowered the man through the roof right in front of Jesus. Observe what Jesus' reaction was to this in verse 20. Jesus "saw their faith". Jesus responded to the faith of the men and proceeded to heal the paralytic man whom the men were carrying. Also note that the men had to literally carry to Jesus their companion who could not get there himself. Moreover, the men had to place their paralytic companion right in front of Jesus. Jesus did not balk or hesitate at their bold actions. Most likely, Jesus was thrilled about what the men had done and He delighted in their faith in Him to heal their companion. The paralytic man probably had no one else other than these men who were close enough, strong enough, concerned enough, and committed enough to carry him to Jesus. The conditions created by these men facilitated God's deliverance activities in the life of their companion.

I am thoroughly convinced that you, the parent, are the best person most suited for influentially bringing your troubled child before God for deliverance. Potentially, you have daily extended contact with your child in his natural home environment. You have a commonality in your family roots or familial relationship that gives the child a sense of belonging, self-worth, and identity through you. Over the years, your child has fulfilled his built-in social need to bond with you, his parent. He has relied on you, the parent, as the primary source to meet his survival needs of receiving guidance for safe living and preparation for adulthood. In the past, he has looked to you, the parent, for moral guidance. No other adult in the community, school, or church holds the vast potential for influencing your youth that you the parent have and do.

In addition to your influence, God has given you the responsibility to raise your child in the training

and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). As the child's parent or substitute parent, you must be willing to carry your child above and beyond the obstacles that hinder spiritual deliverance. You must expend every ounce of energy you have to spiritually bring your child before the Lord. When you have done all that you can appropriately do to arrange a face-to-face encounter with the Lord, then it is up to your child to decide how he is going to respond to the Lord. You cannot make the right decision for your child, but you can carry him to this point. The Lord wants parents to do this. The Lord expects parents to do this.

**A NEW APPROACH:** Undoubtedly you have been exerting yourself to the fullest extent possible to correct the ways of your troubled child. You have repeatedly brought your child to accountability. You have exhausted yourself and all conceivable options possible in trying to ignite a change in his character. You have burned yourself out trying, but your child's hunger for moral corruption fiercely blazes with relentless vigor and consumption. Your soul has been thoroughly scorched in misery and grief. You have no energy left to battle the forest fires of rebellion because your child of fire continues to ravage your determination like wildfire. Granted, you have put forth the best effort that you can. But I would suggest that your options have been limited to your own reasoning and to what information has been available to you so far. Your approach could be modified to enhance its effectiveness.

In the remaining chapters of *Children of Fire*, I would like to offer you a practical, working model of how to facilitate change, which has been derived from biblical principles. The goal of my approach is for you, the parent, to comprehensively create conditions that collaborate with God to unleash His transforming power in the life of your troubled youth. By adapting, adopting, modifying, and/or fine-tuning every aspect of your approach to align with biblical principles, you will be working in full accord with the Lord. This will certainly be a blessing for you, and it has the potential to be an enormous blessing to your child. Your strength can be renewed when you rest in the power of the Lord (Isa. 40:31). And, your hope can be kindled because you know that you are doing everything within your abilities to create an environment that is highly conducive for the Lord to grant your desire (Prov. 10:24). In a sense, you could consider your new biblically-aligned efforts to be a tangible and credible request to and reliance upon the Lord to bless you, your family, and your home (Prov. 3:33). "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isa. 40:28-31).

## **Section II. Plugging In To More Power**

### Chapter 3: Gaining Access to God and His Power

#### **The Need for Change in the Parent**

If you, the parent, are going to pursue your new objective for your troubled youth of creating favorable conditions to bring about age-appropriate compliance with the Word of God through long-term training from it, then several preparations need to take place first so that you do not inadvertently create or perpetuate any stumbling blocks which may hinder the spiritual awakening and growth of your child. Romans 14:13 directs that you should "make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way". To "make up your mind" denotes a conscious, determined decision (Rom. 14:13, GRK; Strong's #2919). Therefore, you must commit to doing everything that you can to identify, correct, and remove any aspects within your life that have been or are causing your child to stumble.

**WILLING TO CHANGE:** Certainly, this commitment must encompass a willingness to change. Some of your attitudes will need to change, particularly those that relate to your child both when he is absent and when he is present with you. Your old natural humanistic ways of thinking about, responding to, and dealing with your child will need to be "put off" or discarded and then replaced with (or "put on") new godly attitudes and ways of treating your child (Eph. 4:22-24).

If you are being honest with yourself, you will have to admit and face the truth that there are some things in your life that will need to be changed. One particularly crucial trait that must be eradicated is any and all hypocrisy. Children, youths, and especially teenagers are quite observant and easily able to spot hypocrisy. Because they are at the stage of development in which they are formulating or adopting their own moral guidelines in life, teenagers are extremely sensitive to the hypocrisy of their parents. Teenagers know that they are expected to adopt the values of their parents. They have been taught their parents' values for years. But, when they identify parental hypocrisy, the teenagers completely discredited the parental values and comprehensively dismiss them as being bogus. Denying, excusing, rationalizing, or minimizing your hypocrisy strengthens your child's rebellion against your values and lifestyle. You must be willing to admit and change your hypocrisy. Within Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus exhorts, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" - meaning that you must clean up the numerous major sins in your own life first before you should try to help or expect others to clean up their few minor sins.

At this point, I want to make it crystal clear, though, that I am not trying to place blame or guilt on you, the parent, for your child's problems. Nor am I going to provide you with an easy escape either. My purpose is to resolve all of the problems that both you and your child are having. From experience, I know that at least half of troubled youths' problems stem from their parents or substitute parents. This may or may not be true in your case. Nevertheless, because your parental contact, influence, and authority over your child have been close and personal for years, whether you are aware of it or not your potential to effect both good and bad in the life of your child has been vast. Considering that no one (except Jesus) is perfect, then over time you have inflicted both good and bad upon your child. All of us parents have. The older your child is, the more you have inflicted. Your imperfection as a parent is a reality that you must live with and be on guard against. It is not a matter of blame, but rather a matter of accepting reality and then responding appropriately.

**FACE THE TRUTH:** Maybe the time has come for you to truthfully face reality about yourself. Despite your good efforts and noble intentions, you have personal problems that have generated some poor parenting choices. On occasion perhaps you have unnecessarily hurt your child - in a similar way that your child is now hurting you. At times, your emotions and desires and pride have carried you too far - just as your child's emotions carry him too far. You have tried your very best to be a good parent, but there still have been moments when you have lost your composure and reasonableness. The truth is your efforts at being a good parent have fallen significantly short of the kind of parent you know you should be.

In response to this reality, take some time right now and review your parental shortcomings and failings. As you recall them, record each on a list and save the list, because you will be using it later in the reconciliation and transformation processes described later in *Children of Fire*. In the next days and months, keep adding to the list as they are remembered or realized. This list is not to serve as a self-condemning reminder but rather as a list of matters that potentially need to be dealt with or resolved. Even if you think that some of these matters should be left buried or are no longer an issue, write them down anyhow because (as we will learn) your perceptions are frequently quite different from your troubled child's perceptions and from God's perceptions of the same matter. What no longer bothers you may still be a sore-spot for your child and affecting him in indistinguishable ways. Likewise, the matter may not have been sufficiently settled with God, either.

Also include on a separate page of this list all of the personal problems that you have, or had, or have been told that you have. These should be of a personal nature, such as emotional problems, bad habits, poor choices, sinful problems, inappropriate reactions, troubled relationships, ungodly attitudes, unhealthy indulgences, unwholesome lifestyle, selfish inclinations, and etc. One reason for including these personal problems is that your youth is watching you closely and taking note of every little (or big) flaw. Troubled youths love to find any justification for their negative behaviors, and your life just might be conveniently supplying your child with the excuse(s) he needs. Another reason to identify and inventory all of your personal problems is because they may (still) be adversely affecting your spiritual well-being and your relationship with God - whose power you want to access in your quest to effect change in your troubled youth.

**NEED DIVINE POWER:** As you compile this list, you may notice that your list is getting long or overwhelming. Instead of letting this discourage you, view your list as a tangible indicator that you are in need of an ongoing infusion of divine power to transform and empower your personal life and parenting skills. Considering the aspects of this new spiritual parenting approach you are now going to undertake should further confirm your need of God's power in your life. Turn this realistic self-inventory of inadequacies into motivation to take corrective action. But, your reliance to solve your problems must shift off from yourself and onto God, because Christ's "power is made perfect in [our] weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). He will release His power the most when we are the weakest and fully dependent upon Him (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Let this list of shortcomings and the daunting tasks confronting you drive you in determination to do whatever it takes to access God's power to solve your personal problems, enhance your parenting skills, and implement God's approach to reaching your troubled youth. A neat part about taking on God's approach to parenting is that you, the parent, get to personally experience God's power too. And after having experienced this transformation yourself, you will then be ready to assist your troubled youth through the same transformational process in his life.

### **God's Requisite for Gaining Access to Him and His Power**

As will be describe next, there is a condition that must be met before a person can even gain access to God's power for victory over personal problems. Like we all do, you the parent must met this condition not only for transformational power in your life, but for power to implement God's approach to parenting. For your own benefit, you will want to be totally sure that you met this condition. Additionally, you will need to understand this requisite well enough to personally assist your troubled child (and all your children) in meeting this condition.

**BE 'IN CHRIST':** To gain access to God and His power, God requires that a person first be 'in Christ'. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). In order for God's power to bring about a transformation from the "old" to the "new", the "if" condition must be met that the person is "in Christ". Note that the conditional word "if" in the phrase "if any man is in Christ" declares that not everyone is 'in Christ'. It also implies that those who are not 'in Christ' do not have access to God's power and are not transformed. This coincides with my contention that humanistic efforts to effect personality change are essentially fruitless. These humanistic efforts fail because they do not place the person 'in Christ' and thereby are completely devoid of God's direct power and transformational activities.

Of the hundreds of troubled teenagers described in the institution case study in chapter one, most of the girls in my group home were the only ones to achieve the condition of being 'in Christ'. Every girl that became 'in Christ' experienced and exhibited some genuine positive lasting personality change. I did not observe any other girls or boys on campus experience lasting personality change - probably because none of them were motivated to become 'in Christ'. I talked with many of them and they openly admitted that they were hostile to the things of God and had no desire to learn how to become 'in Christ'. In essence, they preferred to remain enemies of God.

To be enemies of God sounds serious, and it is. Those who are "enemies" of God do not have access to Him and they will face His wrath against them (Rom. 5:1-2, 9-10). Conversely, those who are 'in Christ' have made "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ", have been "saved" from God's wrath, and have "gained access" into God's favor (Rom. 5:1-2,9).

**FALL SHORT:** Why must we be 'saved' from God's wrath? As we have already learned in chapter 2, all of us humans are born with a sin problem that has an adverse separating effect between the absolutely holy God and us sinful humans, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). This sadly means that because we all have sinned, then we fall short or miss the mark of sinless perfection that God requires for admittance into heaven. Because of our sinfulness, we humans cannot make it into heaven based upon our own goodness. We are born in a state of separation from God, and remain so as His enemies who stand condemned - unless we become 'in Christ' (Jn. 3:18).

**ETERNAL PUNISHMENT:** So if those who are not 'in Christ' cannot make it into heaven on their own when they die, then what will happen to them? Tragically, they will be permanently placed in a very



painful state of existence with no possibility of escape, because "He [the Lord Jesus (v. 7)] will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power..." (2 Thes. 1:8-9). This passage clearly states that those people who continue to be God's enemies at the time of their death will be permanently denied access to God, banished, and punished forever in a place isolated from God. Punishment is required because "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you..." (2 Thes. 1:6). He must punish sins to maintain fairness and justice. Therefore, we humans must suffer an eternal consequence for our sins. Once we have entered into this punishment immediately upon our physical death, we are completely powerless to halt its torturous effects and everlasting duration. This state of existence will remain this way forever. There will be absolutely no way of escape, relief, reprieve, or pardon.

## **The Good News**

This certainly is bad news, but there is good news which will allow access to God, His power, and living forever with God in heaven. Notice in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 that not everyone will face eternal punishment, because those who "know God" and "obey the gospel" (or good message) of our Lord Jesus are excluded or saved from this punishment. God has provided a way of escape that involves obedience to the 'gospel' and knowing God through a personal relationship with Him. He fortifies this message of good news with power to save, because the 'gospel' "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

**JESUS' DEATH:** What exactly is this 'gospel' - this message of good news? A description of it is given in 1 Corinthians 15:2-6, "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve [Disciples]. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time,...". In the New Testament part of the Bible, there are numerous eyewitness accounts and passages testifying to this fact of good news that Jesus died a torturous death on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins, was sealed in a tomb, and came to life 3 days later by the power of God.

Why is this fact of Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead good news? The reason Jesus died this agonizing death was to take upon himself the punishment that we deserve for our sins. "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished -- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." (Rom. 3:25-26). God sacrificed Jesus on the cross to make amends for our sinful condition and to satisfy His righteous requirement of justice. Jesus gave His perfect life and blood to take the punishment in our place - as our substitute, for "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus, who had never sinned because He is God, took upon Himself our sins so that God could give us Jesus' righteousness or credit to us Jesus' absolute holiness and perfection (Jn. 1:1-2,14). By making us righteous in His sight, God is forgiving all of our past, present, and future sins forever in that instant when we establish faith in Jesus and in what God accomplished through the shedding of Jesus' blood. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Eph. 1:7). No matter what sins we have done nor when we have done them, God forgives all of our sins because we have faith in Jesus, who redeemed us by paying the price through His blood.

**ETERNAL LIFE:** Another reason that Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead is good news is because we who believe in Him will enjoy eternal life or living forever in heaven with God when we die, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). God loves each one of us humans even though we have sinned. He does not want us to perish or suffer eternal permanent punishment (2 Pet. 3:9). He loves us so much that He sent Jesus to be sacrificed in payment for our sins so that if we believe in Jesus, then we will

escape eternal punishment and instead possess eternal life. By definition, the word 'eternal' means to be perpetual or continuing forever without interruption or change. Therefore, 'eternal' life is characterized as starting from that initial moment of faith and proceeding unchanged forever thereafter.

There is more good news, however, because one day in the future our dead bodies will be raised to life by the power of God just as Jesus' body was raised from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 6:14 the Word of God promises, "By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also".

Commonly, many well-intending, morally good people think that God will grant them eternal life if the good things they have done in life outweigh the bad things done in life. Some further hypothesize that God is so loving that He would never send anyone to 'eternal' permanent punishment but rather to a temporary state of punishing correction until they self-reform or somehow work their way out of that punishment and into heaven. Tragically, this line of thinking is totally erroneous because God says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). There is no way possible for us humans to get rid of our sin contamination on our own and be good enough to deserve or earn our way into heaven. We do not have within ourselves sufficient intrinsic perfection or power to do this. We miss the mark and fall short every time without exception (see Rom. 3:9-28). To our rescue though, God does offer to pour out favor (grace) upon us in this life by giving us the free gift of salvation - but only through faith and even though we will never deserve it based on our own merit.

**FAITH IN JESUS:** Throughout this entire gospel message of good news, there obviously is one repeated, irrevocable requirement to achieving access to God's power for salvation and behavior change - faith in Jesus Christ. Recalling John 3:16 again, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." We must believe in Jesus. There is no other way to God except through faith in Jesus. As recorded in John 14:6, Jesus clearly declares, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". Access to God, His power, and heaven can only occur through believing in Jesus Christ.

**REPENTANCE:** Truly believing in something dictates that we turn away from and no longer believe in or agree with anything opposite to the new thing we are now truly believing in. By conclusion therefore, having faith in Jesus to save us mandates that we turn away from and no longer have faith in ourselves, our goodness, our good deeds, other humans, religious activities, religious institutions, religious ceremonies, or anything else as a means to save us. It also mandates that we must reverse our thinking in regard to our own sins, change our hearts, and turn to following and obeying God's way towards holy living. Jesus himself said, ""The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"" (Mrk. 1:15). Repentance involves actively turning away from worshiping ourselves through rebellious sinful living, and turning toward worshiping God through obedient godly living. Repentance takes more than an intellectual affirmation of intentions. It takes an ongoing determined commitment to decisively carry out God's directives for holy living.

### **Gaining Access to God Right Now**

**BELIEVING NOW:** God loves each person in the world and He wants each of us to repent and believe. Have you ever responded to His love? Have you ever admitted to God that you have sinned and need Jesus to save you from the eternal penalty of your sins and to take you to heaven when you die? Do you believe without reservation that Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and was raised from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures? Do you have faith that God sacrificed Jesus to give His blood in payment for your sins? Is it your desire to have all of your sins forgiven and to turn from your sinful actions and attitudes? Would you like to change your heart and turn towards God through faith in Jesus right now? If so, then you can tell God so with a prayer like this:

*Dear God,*

*I want to believe in Jesus right now. I believe that You love me even though I have sinned. I believe that You gave your one and only sinless Son, Jesus, to shed His blood and die on the cross in punishment for my sins. I believe that Jesus was buried and was raised from the dead. I do not want to perish in*

*eternal punishment, so please forgive me of my sins. I want Jesus to save me and take me to heaven one day so that I will live there forever. I want to turn from my sinful ways this very moment. I want to turn to You in obedience. I want to know You through a personal relationship with You, and I want to experience your power to change my life. By faith, I believe that You have now freely given me eternal life even though I do not deserve it. Thank you. Amen.*

If this prayer truthfully expresses your thinking, then take some time right now to sincerely state this to God in prayer and commit your life to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you are hesitant or unwilling to place your faith in Jesus Christ, then I must caution you at this critical point that all of the remaining information in *Children of Fire* will be entirely useless to you and your troubled youth until you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ. My whole model for you the parent to collaborate with God in facilitating positive lasting change in your troubled youth foundationally rests on God's condition that you are 'in Christ'. You cannot collaborate with God if in reality He regards you as His enemy and therefore your relationship with Him does not exist. If you are not sure what the status of your relationship with God is, then re-read this chapter again, meditate on the Bible passages I have listed, and in prayer reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ to save you from the consequences of your sins.

PERMANENT: Once you have sincerely place your faith in Jesus, He immediately gives you eternal life by His irrevocable and unconquerable power. Jesus says of those who believe, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (Jn. 10:28-29). There is nothing in all of creation that has sufficient power to undo or cancel God's gift to you of eternal life and the newly-founded relationship you now have with Him through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:38-39).

Having now placed your faith in Jesus Christ, God has made peace with you and has officially started you in a relationship of 'knowing' Him on a personal level. You are no longer His enemy, but rather His permanently adopted child (Rom. 5:1; Jn. 1:12-13). Along with this, He has just opened the door for you to access His power to change your life, and He expects you to change and be transformed towards righteous living (Rom. 12:1-2). Unquestionably, you will want to utilize this opportunity to the fullest extent so that you are as supremely equipped as possible to collaborate with God in effecting change in your troubled youth.

## Section II. Plugging In To More Power (cont.)

### Chapter 4: Drawing Upon God's Power

SCENARIO: Acquiring a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ is the first step toward equipping you in your objective of collaborating with God to reach your troubled youth. The next step is to learn how to draw upon His power. A picturesque way to discuss this topic is with a scenario of having one of our country's most modern and high-powered Army tanks sitting in your backyard. The U.S. Army delivered the tank and gave you unrestricted authority to use the tank whenever you please. The battle is raging and you have been suffering many injuries and defeats. So hastily you climb into the tank, only to quickly discover that you do not know how to even start the tank - let alone utilize all of its capabilities and firepower to blast apart enemy strongholds. When you jump into the driver's seat, push the buttons and pull the levers, nothing happens. Your attempts at pushing the tank do not work either. So, there in your backyard the Army tank still sits - unused. And, you assume it does not work.

Meanwhile, the enemy strongholds grow stronger and your present arsenal of primitive stone-age weapons are frivolous against their formidable weaponry and fortifications. You talk with some of your neighbors who also have an Army tank in their backyard, and you learn that they have never been able to move theirs either. The outlook becomes grim and you give up hope. You prepare to surrender.

Then one day you realize that you need to read the Operator's Manual and operate the tank according to the manufacturer's instructions in order to access and utilize its vast firepower potential. This will certainly take time, self-discipline, commitment, studying, and practice, but "Wow!" - the power that is available to you at your fingertips once you get the hang of operating it in the prescribed way. You

quickly discover that this tank is exactly suited for your needs and it has been awaiting your usage all this time. You had to merely learn how to access its power and then put it to use.

Like this scenario of the Army tank, the vast potential of God's "incomparably great power" is available to all believers who have "faith in the Lord Jesus" (Eph. 1:19,15). Sadly, most believers live a life of defeat to their sinful strongholds because they have never learned how to draw upon God's power. Many assume that no power is available to them - that God dramatically changes people only on rare occasions. Consequently, they unsuccessfully try to overcome strongholds exclusively by themselves through their own humanistic willpower. Spiritually, intellectually, and physically, we humans are too weak to overcome spiritual sinful strongholds. But, victory can be achieved through learning how to draw upon the "all-surpassing power [that] is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

**GOD'S WAY:** Obviously, God is not a mindless machine nor a mysterious force (like gravity) that can be manipulated by us for our purposes. God is God, and we cannot just plug into His outlet for power in whatever fashion we please. We must approach and do things His way in order to accomplish anything of value to Him. The Word of God instructs that we must do things (or "bear fruit") in and through Christ as our source of spiritual strength (Jn. 15:4). "Apart from [Christ] [we] can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). This is quite clear and highly restrictive. But God has the right to demand that things be done His way. He is the Creator of all that exists - including us humans. God and His instructions are not open to debate or compromise. We must work with God, doing things His way through Christ, in order to obtain His empowering.

#### **4 Levels of Maximizing One's Relationship With God**

In terms of subduing the seemingly invincible sinful behaviors and attitudes of your troubled youth, you the parent will wisely want to be able to use as much of God's power as He will supply. This necessitates that you maximize your relationship with God so that through firsthand experience, you learn how to comprehensively draw on His "divine power to demolish strongholds" within yourself and your child (2 Cor. 10:4).

**PARABLE OF THE SOWER:** Believers' relationship with God can be generally categorized into 4 attainable levels of maximizing of one's relationship with God. Even though the Bible repeatedly exhorts believers to progress all the way into the top level of utmost maximized relationship with God, most believers never make it past the first level. I have derived the first 3 levels based upon the descriptions in the 'Parable of the Sower' in Matthew 13:3-9,18-23 (cf. Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). Take some time right now to read and study this parable before continuing.

**UNRESPONSIVE:** The 'Parable of the Sower' is about the ways that people respond when they hear the Word of God. In the parable, Jesus first identifies one way as being anyone who hears the Word but does not believe because he does not understand it (v.19). This is like seed that falls on the hardened trampled path and never sprouts (v.19). This person rejects God's Word and thereby rejects God. Despite God's love for this person, God is not pleased with him and does not accept him. Because no relationship with God is ever started, this response to God in no way seeks a relationship with God, and thereby does not qualify as a level.

##### Level 1 'Rocky Soil'

**MARGINALLY RESPONSIVE:** The next way of responding to hearing the Word of God is identified as being like seed that falls on rocky soil. I would correlate this with my level 1 of being the lowest level of maximizing one's relationship with God. The 'Rocky Soil' person "hears the word and at once receives it with joy" (v.20). This person becomes a believer with initial enthusiasm. But "when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (v.21). He initially experiences new life from his new faith and his new relationship with God, but he then quickly fades away from these because he has not become rooted or grounded in the faith (v.6). To God's disapproval, he fails to develop this new relationship and the spiritual disciplines necessary to maintain a healthy faith. No sustained attempt is made to maximize his relationship with God. Behaviors temporarily improve but then revert back to previous states. No measurable lasting behavioral and personality change have occurred. Because he personally lacks the power to endure trials and he has not pursued how to draw

power from God, he quickly gives into sinful worldly indulgences that strangle his spiritual growth and relationship with God.

Conceivably, new believers are particularly vulnerable to succumbing to this hazard. I think that typically the problem arises from our natural overriding desire to have the best of both worlds. We want the benefits that accompany our new life in Christ, but we also want the enjoyment we derive from gratifying worldly pursuits and/or from engaging in our strongholds of sin. We want to go to heaven but we really do not want to give up our sins. Many new believers hold to this thinking and are shallow in their moral perseverance because, for whatever reasons, they leave both feet firmly implanted in sinful worldliness.

Perhaps your life can be accurately characterized in this manner as having quickly fallen away into sinful indulgences shortly after believing in Christ. You started your faith with good intentions, but your new spiritual life just never blossomed. Not comprehending why, you drifted back into sinful living. A short distance out of the starting gate, you stumbled morally and subsequently never recovered to continue the race in a God-honoring manner (Phil. 3:14). You failed the "time of testing" and your life has since been securely entrapped in moral defeat (Lk. 8:13).

Maybe you have observed your troubled youth take this same direction in his life. If your youth is a recent believer, then there is a substantial looming danger that he may derail his faith like this. His old sinful way of living will be a strong allure for him to return. If you, the parent, want your child to achieve lasting change, you must reset yourself on track. By proceeding into all of the remaining upper levels of maximizing your relationship with God, you will experience victories over your strongholds and thus you will then be better equipped to help your child into these upper levels too.

#### Level 2 'Green But Barren'

**PREOCCUPIED RESPONSIVE:** The next level of maximizing one's relationship with God can aptly be entitled "Green But Barren". Again based upon the 'Parable of the Sower', this level corresponds to the seed that lands among the thorns (Matt. 13:22). The thorns "grew up with [the seed] and choked the plants", "so that they did not bear" fruit (Lk. 8:7; Mrk. 4:7). This person "hears the word, but the worries of this life", "the deceitfulness of wealth", "riches and pleasures", "and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful" or barren (Matt. 13:22; Lk. 8:14; Mrk. 4:19).

Like the 'Rocky Soil' person, the 'Green But Barren' person hears the Word of God and believes. In contrast, though, the 'Green But Barren' person has advanced in his faith beyond the 'Rocky Soil' person by staying green with life in the faith. He is actively involved in the practice of his faith. Presumably, he studies the Word of God, has grounded himself in the basics of the faith, and has learned the foundational doctrines. As a result, he has acted responsibly since becoming a believer to successfully establish a devotional life and maintain his faith and his relationship with God. He has been fairly consistent in daily: reading the Bible; studying it to determine its meaning; and praying. His church attendance has been regular and he tries to go to as many church social functions as his schedule will allow. To the best of his own limited abilities and understanding, the 'Green But Barren' person has responded obediently to the Lord's desire that believers should establish these disciplines in their lives (Eph. 6:18; Heb. 10:25; Ps. 1:2).

The typical 'Green But Barren' person thinks that he is spiritually mature with a healthy relationship with God. He has bought into and follows the popular standard formula that 'to keep your life right with the Lord, just read your Bible and pray every day'. Practicing his faith in this manner seems to work satisfactorily for him, and for the most part he is content with how he pursues his faith and with his perceived relationship with God.

**DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP:** The 'Green But Barren' person is correct in his assertion that his relationship with God is functioning. However, in reality it is dysfunctional. He has developed personal disciplines, but the truth is he is merely maintaining his faith just adequately enough to keep him alive in it. Outwardly, he looks, sounds, and acts religious. His behaviors have changed - some. Yet, inwardly, his personality has changed only marginally because his allegiance is divided between worldliness and the Lord. He purposefully harbors strongholds of sin that dominate and control his life. Consequently, he experiences much inner turmoil and conflict because of the incompatibility, friction, and contention between these two competing philosophies of life.

As a side effect of his spiritual maturity being choked, he is not accomplishing anything of value to God as evidenced by the absence of spiritual fruit in his life. The ministry work that he does is unacceptable to the Lord because of sinful or carnal motives, attitudes, or manner (1 Cor. 13:1-3; 1 Thes. 2:3-4). His strongholds of preoccupation with life's worries contaminate his service for and relationship with the Lord. Spiritually, he is 'Green But Barren' due to residual entrenched moral impurity and to being unwilling to change. While having a better relationship with God than the 'Rocky Soil' person, the 'Green But Barren' person settles for far less than a maximized relationship with God even though God is not entirely pleased. He is content with living a life devoid of any substantial power from God.

In your struggles to cope with your troubled child, has your faith subtly slipped into fruitless stagnation? Have the stresses and demands of your job, your financial obligations, your family, and your spouse conjoined with the preoccupying tribulations generated by your troubled child to overwhelm you - leaving precious few moments and energy to spend on building your relationship with the Lord? Do you yearn for the Lord to release His power in your life? If your faith is 'Green But Barren', perhaps this could be an important factor as to why your troubled child is rejecting your faith. Maybe it is time to shift your priorities and change how you are managing your life.

### Level 3 'Good Soil'

**COMMITTED RESPONSIVE:** Building upon the qualities of the disciplines of the faith, the next level goes a step further in one's relationship with God. This person in this level is honorably classified as being 'Good Soil' - and for several reasons. His heart is "noble and good", being virtuous with moral excellence and righteousness (Luke 8:15 NIV, GRK; Strong's #2570). When he "hears" the Word of God, he "understands", "accepts", and "retains" it (Matt. 13:23; Mrk. 4:20; Lk. 8:15). Then with the Word firmly planted and growing in his heart, the 'Good Soil' person acts upon the Word through persevering to produce a bountiful crop (Lk. 8:15; Matt. 13:23).

**SOLD OUT:** Clearly, this person responds to the Word of God far differently than those in the lower levels. His heart attitude is extraordinarily uncharacteristic of their norm. In contrast to others who are preoccupied with themselves or with the worries of life, the 'Good Soil' person has rearranged his priorities to put God first in his life - primarily because he "loves the Lord [his] God with all [his] heart and with all [his] soul and with all [his] mind and with all [his] strength" (Mrk. 12:30). In essence, he has structured and consecrated his heart and his life to consistently be sold out to God and be in alignment with His Word. In order to follow after Jesus, this person consistently denies himself and takes up his mission every day (Lk. 9:23). Sacrificing his own personal comforts and aspirations, he stays focused on doing work for the Lord in a manner and attitude that pleases God.

**COLLABORATING:** The heart attitude behind this quality of consistent God-pleasing self-denial has an unusual empowering by God, because it is contrary to the drives of our basic sinful nature and it suitably meets God's approval. The fact that the 'Good Soil' person is abundantly accomplishing works that please God despite the hindrances suggests that he is effectively drawing on God's power. Functioning in conjunction with his disciplines of the faith, his heart attitude is collaborating with God's Spirit.

One evidence of this man-with-God collaboration is that the 'Good Soil' person "understands" and "accepts" the word when he hears it (Matt. 13:23; Mrk. 4:20). Scriptures declare that "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Considering that all believers receive the Holy Spirit into their lives the very moment they believe (2 Cor. 1:21-22), the 'Good Soil' person is tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit in a teachable way that surpasses ordinary (lower level) believers.

It is crucial to note that this special endowment of power from the Holy Spirit does not come automatically nor through mystical, magical, or charismatic means. Rather, conditions in the person's heart have become ripe for empowering as he: "hears" or takes in the Word of God; meditates on it to gain "understanding"; "accepts" or agrees with it; "retains" or places it as the overriding guiding principles in his life; depends and acts upon it to "produce a crop"; and "perseveres" or sticks with it through various impediments (Matt. 13:23; Mrk. 4:20; Lk. 8:15). This describes purposeful dedication, commitment, consistency, self-sacrifice, and hard work to learn and live the Word of God.

**YIELDINGNESS:** When viewed as a whole, these fertile conditions in the heart of the 'Good Soil' person reflect a deep inner comprehensive yieldingness or submission to the will of God. He is actively striving to weave his desire to "submit... to God" into every aspect of his thinking, personality, behaviors, and life (Jam. 4:7). Consciously and to the best of his abilities, he holds nothing in reserve from submitting to God. This includes a total surrender in his thought-life to the maximum influence and control of the Holy Spirit. He is intentionally encouraging God's Spirit to "transform [him] by the renewing of [his] mind" (Rom. 12:2). Through living out these fertile conditions, he is consciously offering himself to God and inviting God to release power in his life to change him, as directed in Romans 12:1-2:

1. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship.
2. Do not conform any longer 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".

For various reasons, most believers never reach this level of total yieldingness to God. Many pastors and a few believers are able to naturally attain this yieldingness because of their unusual personality and upbringing. But for the majority of us believers, however, this yieldingness does not come naturally at all. We desperately want to be in charge of how our lives are run. Giving up control to God and letting Jesus sit in the driver's seat of our life is not easy, natural, or appealing to us.

Therefore in order to attain this level of yieldingness, we must sincerely and deliberately take the step every day to offer the Lord reigning control of our life. In a literal way, we must heed and put into practice the command in Romans 12:1 for believers "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship". Through prayer, we must daily offer our entire being to God - our minds in everything we think, our tongues in everything we say, our hands in everything we do, our feet in everywhere we go, our eyes in everything we look at, our ears in everything we listen to, our stomachs in everything we consume, our bodies in every message we send, and etc. We freely give up how we want to run our life, and we voluntarily offer it to God to use and run how He wants. Because we so easily forget and revert back to our natural state of being in charge of our own life, we must intentionally practice this sacrificial offering over to God every day.

**CONFESSING SINS:** Notice in the Romans 12:1 passage, however, that there is another stipulation to meet before God will assume influential control over our life and will. We must offer ourselves "holy and pleasing to God". Common sense and logical reasoning retort that we cannot be holy and pleasing to God if we are or have been engaged in sinning. And, our sinful nature prevents us from achieving a state of absolute sinlessness in this life (1 Jn. 1:8). Therefore, the best that we can aspire toward is a fragile state of cleansed-ness through repeated and frequent forgiveness of sins and cleansing from God.

The Lord faithfully provides this cleansing when believers confess their sins as instructed in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness". Believers are to be holy because God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). When believers truthfully confess their sins to the Lord, He will always forgive those sins, purify the believer from the sinfulness that obstructs his relationship with God, and restore the believer to a state of holiness.

Being cleansed from all unrighteousness through the confessing of sins is a non-negotiable requirement for achieving a state of yieldingness. One reason for this is because we cannot serve two masters at the same time (Matt. 6:24). We cannot be yielding to our own sinful desires and at the same time be yielding to God's righteousness. Our indulging in sinfulness is adversarial to God's absolute holiness and His holy expectations for us. To ignore the sinfulness we have engaged in is disrespectful to God's holiness. Yes, God freely extends forgiveness, but at the same time He considers our sinful indulgences to be a serious debilitating barrier in our relationship with Him. Sin does not break the relationship between a believer and God, yet it does hamper amicability.

**DAILY CLEANSING:** Some people claim that confession is not necessary because we have already automatically received cleansing the moment we became a believer. This contention is true in regard to

our final standing (or ultimate sanctification) with God, but it does not take into account our present daily need to be spiritually clean (progressive sanctification) before we can commune unobstructed-ly with the Lord. Also, it outright rejects or dismisses the teaching in 1 John 1:9. Receiving purification from God is contingent upon our confession of sins, and being "holy and pleasing to God" is contingent upon our being purified from sins. Therefore, attaining a state of yieldingness to God demands that we are repeatedly confessing our sins for daily purification.

Due to our sinfulness though, maintaining a state of cleansed yieldingness is a seesaw endeavor - especially when we first start trying to maintain this state. One moment we confess our sins and invite the Lord to be in reigning control of our life - which He does. A few minutes later, we sin - thereby knocking the Lord out of control of our life and retaking mastery of it ourself. So we then must again "renew our mind" by confessing our sin and inviting the Lord to retake reigning control (Rom. 12:2). To maximize our empowering by God, throughout the day this process needs to be repeated whenever we sin. This repetition may seem redundant, but it is: required by God; necessary for cleansing; enlightening to raise awareness of one's sins; and requisite for being empowered and controlled by God to the maximum extent. Increased awareness of one's sins also significantly aids one in actively trying not to sin (repentance) - which is one of God's main objectives for us.

Another benefit of maintaining cleansed yieldingness to the Lord all day long is that God considers this to be our "spiritual act of worship" of Him (Rom. 12:1). He delights in our sincere continuous efforts at being pleasing to Him, as is stated in Proverbs 11:20, "The LORD detests men of perverse heart but he delights in those whose ways are blameless". Through the living of our lives in complete yieldingness to Him, we are worshipping Him in a manner that goes well beyond mere words. Our faith is being exercised by believing that He is pleased with our offering of cleansed yieldingness. Behavior change away from "conformity... to the pattern of this world" is occurring (Romans 12:2). Personality transformation through the "renewing of the mind" is likewise proceeding at an accelerated rate (v.2). Acceptable ministry service is being accomplished for the Lord through His empowering and direct supervision (v.2). Testimony is being visibly declared to the world that the Lord is worth giving up our own way of living for. As worship, efforts are made to bring every aspect of our 'Good Soil' life into conformity with God's will. Maximizing our relationship with God is a high priority and desired outcome of this worship.

**OVERRIDES STRONGHOLDS:** Although the 'Good Soil' approach has numerous benefits and excellent qualities, there is however one major obstacle that it does not remedy sufficiently. Strongholds of sin are not automatically removed nor do they mysteriously disappear when a believer successfully maintains the process of daily staying cleansed and yielding. Instead, the strongholds are being overridden and overpowered. This results in the strongholds being significantly weakened but not exterminated. They continue to stay intact, to exert some influence, to surface periodically, and to pose a threat of being restored to their former powerful grip. Moreover, these overridden strongholds continue to spew out psychological temptations that bombard, plague, and entice the 'Good Soil' servant of the Lord to return to his old sinful ways. In occasional moments of weakness, the person may act upon a stronghold temptation, and thereupon experience a spiritual roller coaster of ups and downs in which he is vacillating between being controlled by sinfulness and then controlled by righteousness.

Believers should not be naive or content with just successfully resisting, managing, and subduing strongholds of sin. Persistent temptations and spiritual roller coasters are not fun to endure. Demolition and complete extraction of all strongholds of sin are God's ultimate goal, so that believers can be blessed with a life of inner peace (2 Cor. 10:4; Jn. 14:27). In John 8:31-36, Jesus Himself declares that He wants to set believers free from their enslavement to sins. Believers should settle for nothing less than the total freedom that Christ is offering.

Doesn't this 'Good Soil' approach sound appealing? Wouldn't it be refreshing to 'let go and let God' be ultimately responsible for how your life, your problems, your worries, your finances, and your troubled child turn out? Can you imagine what might happen in and through your life if you offered yourself to the Lord to have complete reign over your thoughts, words, and actions? Deep down inside, do you long for the Lord to revitalize your spiritual life? How do you think it would feel to be free from those intrusive thoughts to yell at and strike your troubled child in those tense moments? Is it time for you to make some drastic changes in your relationship with the Lord? Take some time right now to digest and



reflect on how the 'Good Soil' person responds to hearing the Word of God. Is this how the Lord wants you to respond? Do you want to become 'Good Soil' - today?

#### Level 4 'Tenderized Heart'

**COMPREHENSIVELY RESPONSIVE:** Thus far through our examination of 3 levels of maximizing one's relationship with God, it is interesting that the strongholds of sin behave just as their name suggests. They are persistent and tenacious. Their defenses are formidable and able to withstand repeated assaults. They possess intrinsic power to exert control over a particular area of sinfulness in a person's life. And, they continue to perpetuate sinfulness even in their weakened state for the distinct purpose of disrupting the believer's relationship with the Lord. The power bestowed by the Lord to the cleansed and yielding person significantly diminishes the effects of strongholds, but it does not remove them. This is not because God's power is too weak. Instead, it is because God's power is being diverted by the person to circumvent the strongholds rather than to target them directly. For whatever reason(s), the 'Good Soil' person is avoiding dealing with his strongholds.

**ATTACKS STRONGHOLDS:** This fourth level of maximizing one's relationship with God builds further upon being a 'Good Soil' person by straightforwardly attacking strongholds to achieve their demolition and complete removal. Considering that strongholds reside in the hidden secret depths of a person's personality or heart, this person unreservedly exposes his entire heart to the Lord for examination and reproof. No matter how painful, sensitive, embarrassing, secretive, or depraved the stronghold is, this person readily brings them before the Lord as he becomes aware of them. Nothing remains guarded or protected. Hearing and accepting what the Lord wants him to do with an area of sin, he then immediately makes the necessary corrections and perseveres to institute any additional corrections until the entire stronghold has been removed. In effect, this person strives to 'tenderize' his heart to the Lord.

A key passage for having a 'Tenderized Heart' is Psalm 139:23-24:

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

**SENSITIVE TO GOD:** This passage is a prayer - a request to the Lord. The 'Tenderized Heart' person regularly prays for and earnestly seeks an answer to this request. He wants to know what his strongholds of sin are - what "divides" his thinking and allegiance (v.23; GRK; Strong's #5587) - what in his life or thinking is "morally wrong", "wicked", or "offensive" to God (v.24; GRK; Strong's #7563). This person truly desires to be "holy and pleasing" to the Lord in every facet of his life (Rom. 12:1). Character improvement is a pressing priority for him. He wants to face all areas of sinfulness and deal with them forthwith. He wisely understands that some things that seem acceptable to him may be quite offensive to God. He also realizes that a person cannot work on an area of sinfulness unless he is aware of it. So he sincerely wants the Lord to show him what needs correcting in his life. He is earnestly asking for divine assistance in changing his personality so that his relationship with God might become closer and more intimate.

**HEART SEARCH:** Acknowledging that our omniscient (all-knowing) Creator already knows his deep inner thoughts, the 'Tenderized Heart' person asks for a "penetrating", "intimate examination" or "search" of his "heart" or personality (v.23; NIV; GRK; Strong's #2713). This is for his own benefit - not for God's. His request is for the Lord to reveal areas of sinfulness through the means of "testing" and trials (v.23). This is a fairly bold request because no one likes to go through testing and trials - least of all to reveal their own flaws. To invite the Lord to test you is seemingly like inviting Him to inflict suffering on you. But the 'Tenderized Heart' person trusts that the Lord will not test him "beyond what [he] can bear", and he has faith that the testing will refine his character (1 Cor. 10:13; Rom. 5:3-4). He replaces his fear with trust and faith.

**ETERNAL FOCUS:** Faith also is applied to the future. The 'Tenderized Heart' person knows that life is meaningless and vain apart from the Lord (Ecc. 12). In wisdom and faith, he fixes his view upon accomplishing things in life that God esteems as having eternal or "everlasting" value (Psalms 139:24). With a yielding heart, he wants the Lord to "lead" and "guide" his "way" or "course of life" so that it will have eternal value (v.24; NIV; GRK; Strong's #5148, #1870). The 'Tenderized Heart' person is driven by a passion to make a difference in this world. He is always keenly mindful that things in life need to be

accomplished in God's way and through God's empowering in order to meet His approval and achieve His desired outcome. This person craves for the Lord to use him to bring about good in the lives of others, but nevertheless he is starkly aware that strongholds of sin hinder and/or prevent him from bearing eternal fruit for the Lord.

**LORD'S ACTIVITIES:** As the passage in Psalm 139:23-24 implies, the Lord longs for this kind of heart that is open and waiting to be transformed and purified (Ps. 51:10). He is eager and more than willing to reveal areas of sinfulness to a person. When a person becomes open to being convicted of his sins, the Lord dismantles the person's pride and instills a sense of true reality regarding how decrepit he is in his sinfulness. The Lord patiently leads the person to where he has "a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart" that is regretful and sorrowful for the transgressions being committed against Him (Psalms 51:17). In this state, the heart has become tenderized - ready and prepared to be purified (Psa.ms 51:10).

**SCRIPTURES:** To expose, convict, prepare, and purify humans of their areas of sinfulness, the Lord uses Scriptures, which He has specifically designed to be "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God empowers Scriptures to be "living and active" so that it "penetrates" to the depths of one's soul where it "judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). There is an obligation, however, for believers to employ Scriptures (coupled with prayer) as the primary offensive weapon for getting rid of strongholds of sin (Eph. 6:17). Like the Army tank scenario, the challenge is to learn how to effectively wield the sword of God's Word - logically to pierce the core of each stronghold, disarm it, and then sever it from one's life.

Obviously, effective wielding of the sword of God's Word to remove strongholds should not include ignoring, discounting, minimizing, twisting, or excusing away any convicting Scriptures that make a person uneasy. To the contrary, such responses to hearing the Word of God only harden one's heart further and strengthen strongholds. Yet, this is exactly how some believers handle and manipulate the Word of God to achieve their selfish purposes of acquiring wealth, position, power, or prominence within the church (see 1 Tim 6:3-5). Invariably as a result, these people eventually have to deceive themselves and others in order to perpetuate their acquisition-al efforts (1 Jn. 1:6). While projecting an incorrectly perceived or false air of spiritual maturity, they pervert the meaning of the Word of God in order to deceive their constituents into supporting them (Acts 20:30; 2 Cor. 4:1-2). They also take passages out of context and exalt them to manufacture or shore up shaky religious doctrines that supposedly prove their high level of spiritual maturity and intimacy with God. Such mishandling of the Word of God in reality builds sinful strongholds - not demolishes them.

**TRUTH:** When the Word of God is interpreted and applied properly, its intrinsic truth shines forth to confront, oppose, and counteract the lies and/or deception that are at the core of every stronghold. In the passage of John 8:31-36, Jesus discloses that He and "the truth will set you free" from the enslavement to sin (vv.32,34,36; cf. Rom. 2:8). Logical reasoning would assert that if Jesus says the truth is to be used as a weapon against enslavement to sin, and the truth is opposite of lies, then the conclusion is that the truth is employed to neutralize the lies which empower strongholds of sin. Jesus verifies this assertion a few verses later in John 8:43-45 that lies are enslaving and keeping his oppositional listeners from hearing, understanding, and believing Him and His teaching.

**JESUS' TEACHING:** Care should be taken here not to assume that just listening to truth will immediately and magically free a person from enslavement to sin. Yes, gaining a knowledge of the truth does open the way to godliness (Titus 1:1). But in this passage, Jesus is distinguishing that there is more to it. Believers are to "hold to my [Jesus'] teaching" - meaning "to stay" in His "word" (v.31; GRK; Strong's #3306, #3056). Like the 'Good Soil' person in the parable of the sower, this indicates steadfastly continuing to hear, understand, accept, believe, obey, and live the truth of Jesus's teaching. Continuing to walk in the truth or living in obedience to the truth will produce purification (3 Jn. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:22). The truth to be lived is Jesus, and all that He is - His life, His truth, and His teaching of Scriptures - the Word from God (Jn. 8:40; 14:6; 1:1).

**CHANGES ALLEGIANCE:** In addition to properly interpreting, applying, and living God's Word in truth, accessing God's power through wielding the sword of God's Word also involves targeting the truth of God's Word specifically at the lies rooted in the core of each stronghold of sin and then attacking them

for neutralization. Notice that during this attack process, the person has changed allegiance in regard to the stronghold. Previously, he agreed with the stronghold by; believing its lies; perhaps loving it; hiding, rationalizing, or denying it; surrendering to it; engaging in it; feeding it; and protecting it. Now, he opposes the stronghold by: rejecting its lies; believing only God's truth; detesting the stronghold; admitting its existence; taking responsibility for it; exposing it; ceasing to engage in it; starving it; and aggressively attacking it.

In summary, the 'Tenderized Heart' person persists in doing everything he can to maximize his relationship with God. His heart is sensitive and responsive to the things of God. He advances through the lower levels with increasing self-discipline, commitment, obedience, consistency, dedication, and spiritual maturity. To accelerate the growth of holiness of his life, he draws on God's power to tenaciously dig out and "take a stand" against each individual stronghold of sin while simultaneously creating conducive conditions in his life for the Lord to remove them (Eph. 6:11). With diligence he works to "purify [himself] from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1). As he successfully proceeds to remove sinfulness and develop holiness (progressive sanctification) through this process, God's power is active and being accessed to effect major positive lasting behavioral and personality change. Through his striving to maximize his relationship with God, the 'Tenderized Heart' person has learned how to be set free from his enslavement to sin. He is directly experiencing God's power in his life.

What is your response to the Lord's desire for you to have a tenderized heart? Will you pursue such a close relationship with Him and make God the only one who reigns in your life? Are you going to start facing and dealing with your strongholds of sin in His way according to biblical principles? Does the potential dramatic effect this could have on your life and subsequently on your troubled child motivate you to pursue this with all of your strength? Collaborating with the Lord is by far the best choice, and letting Him reign supreme in a purified heart is the best way to collaborate with Him.

## **Section III. Getting to the Heart of The Problem**

### **Chapter 5: Objectives and Influences of Strongholds**

Having now studied the basics of how to draw upon God's power in one's life, the next step is to learn how to effectively bring that power to bear specifically against strongholds of sin - in both your life as parent, and your troubled child's life. If you are going to be the person to facilitate this kind of application of God's power in your child, you must first learn how to do this by yourself on your own. As you become aware of strongholds in your life, you must be self-initiating attacks on them and subsequently be experiencing some victories.

While becoming a 'Tenderized Heart' person (Level 4) is the ideal and most preferable, the Lord does grant victories over strongholds to believers who are at any level of spiritual maturity. But, it is extremely difficult to achieve any victories in one's own life unless the person is either: 1. very self-motivated to strive towards a yielding, cleansed, tenderized heart; or 2. has the assistance of a facilitator to personally mentor, exhort, and counsel him. Considering that you probably have no one to personally counsel you, then you must strive on your own for the most maximized, stronghold-free relationship with the Lord as you can. Your troubled child, however, will most likely not initially aspire to such self-motivated dedication to the Lord and will thereby need your mature exhortation and counsel, which you acquire from maximizing your spiritual maturity (Rom. 15:1-2).

### **Objectives of Strongholds**

**TO OPPOSE GOD:** In learning how to effectively bring God's power to bear against strongholds, it is quite advantageous to first understand the underlying objectives of strongholds so that you can more easily identify them and take a stand against them. The primary objective within strongholds is to prevent and obstruct the person's relationship with the Lord. In opposition to God's absolute holiness, strongholds

desire to drive the person as far away from God as possible through promoting and perpetuating sinfulness (see Rom. 1:18-32). The intent is to make the person spiritually unacceptable or unclean before the Lord, and un-desirous of developing a relationship with Him.

Strongholds incorporate a wide variety of means and degree of influence in order to produce effects that are contrary to God, His Scriptures, His laws, and the truth. The degree or seriousness of the sins perpetuated by strongholds can range anywhere between being relatively minor to being catastrophic. Some examples of strongholds driving a person away from the Lord are: encouraging or engaging in wild living, negative peer pressure, dissension, or division; doubt; unbelief; laziness; disinterest in religion; resistance to getting one's life right with the Lord; or relativism.

**TO BE THE MASTER:** The pinnacle in the promoting and perpetuating of sinfulness is to gain mastery over the person. In the Genesis 4:1-17 biblical account of Cain murdering his brother Abel, the Lord warns angry Cain that "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (v.7). The Lord describes clearly that Cain's sinful thinking was desiring to establish mastery over him and to push him to commit wickedness. Sin was "stretching out after" and "longing" to "rule" Cain (v.7; GRK; Strong's #8669, #4910). In effect, sin desired to entrap Cain and become a god in Cain's life - to be worshiped, obeyed, served, and adored as a god in the rightful place of the only true God (2 Tim. 2:26). Strongholds purpose to set themselves up on the throne of a person's life to reign, hold captive, and control unto sinfulness, so that God is hindered from rightfully being set up to reign unto righteousness (Col. 2:8). Examples of strongholds that purpose to gain mastery over a person are: compulsions; addictions; habits; overindulgences; prejudices; all forms of idolatry; any state of discomposure such as abnormal behaviors and disorders; fits, rages, rants, frenzies, dithers; compulsive television watching; workaholism; worldly philosophies (Col. 2:8); and liberal or divergent theologies.

**TO BRING HARM:** Another objective, which is simultaneously utilized by strongholds to achieve their primary objective of opposing God, is to cause and perpetuate harm to its victim and others through such means as stealing, killing, destroying, incapacitating, harassing, tormenting, or torturing (Jn. 10:7-10; 5:1-15; Jam. 5:14-16). Strongholds delight when people are walking through the fires of suffering, trials, and tribulations. The perpetuating of harm may be with or without the intentional cooperation of the victim or host. The amount of suffering which strongholds inflict ranges anywhere from mildly annoying to severely unbearable. Easily identifiable examples of strongholds that bring harm are: depression; worry; anger; hate; racism; greed; abandonment; revenge; violence; suicide; eating disorders; antagonizing; criticizing; and mocking.

**TO STAY IN THE VICTIM:** A side effect of the purpose to bring harm is that strongholds make every effort to stay in their victims. Usually they try to sustain their presence by hiding or camouflaging to avoid accurate detection. Or, they may seek to persuade the victim and society that they are a natural part of the person's personality or psychological makeup. Initially their preferred strategy is to continue to exert influence without the victim being aware of their presence so that they can solidify their hold upon the person.

For many types of strongholds though, they can become more powerful, do more harm, and stay in the victim longer if they can recruit the victim to love them, protect them, and cooperate with their purposes. Concealing their true nature from the victim is usually futile in the long-term because the victim has enough functioning conscience to identify what is wrong inside. So when it is no longer possible to conceal their true identity, strongholds will try to convince or confuse the victim into denying, discounting, or rationalizing their presence in order to stay in the victim. Essentially, strongholds are trying to convert the victim into either a cooperative, a willing, or a non-resistant host. Their foremost preference, however, is to ultimately develop the victim into their lover, who burns with passion for wickedness.

An example that parallels this striving to stay in the victim is teenagers who become gang members. They know that gangbanging activities are sinful and entirely unacceptable to society. But for various reasons, they become a gangbanger anyways (Rom. 1:32). To stay in the gang, they go to extremes to conceal their gang membership from adults. Yet, gangbangers simultaneously work to display their fierce loyalty in competition to other rival gangbangers and to aggressively promote the perpetuation of their particular gang. If an adult suspects that a teenager is a gangbanger, the teenager will vehemently deny,

discount, or distort his gang membership to the adult. When the adult is around, the gangbanger will diligently portray himself as a fine upstanding citizen who wants to 'hang out' with his decent friends. A few moments later when the naive or gullible adult is not aware, the teenager stealth-fully and secretly engages in wicked gang activities with his peers.

**TO DECEIVE:** Notice in this gangbanger example that deception is craftily incorporated in order to maintain the existence, perpetuation, and promotion of the gangbanging stronghold (Rom. 1:18,30,32). The deception can be presented in a variety of forms: lies; half-truths; distortions; masquerades; confusion; evading; preying on naivety or gullibility; schemes; charades (pretending); and etc. Cleverly, elaborately, and masterfully projected deception can prove to be quite successful over the undiscerning. Distorting and deflecting the truth is a primary survival and offensive tactic of strongholds.

As you already know, your troubled youth has become quite adept and talented in deceiving adults. To counter this, you must become highly discerning of his expert deceptions and wise to his schemes and pretenses. In James 1:5-6, believers are advised that, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt...". Put this on your prayer list to ask the Lord every day for wisdom and discernment in dealing with your troubled youth.

**TO BECOME ENTRENCHED:** A natural result that occurs from deception is that more deception is needed to support and uphold the original deception. One lie is usually insufficient to satisfy a suspicious, questioning parent. So more lies and deception are created and implemented to substantiate the original deception and to cover the truth. Deception breeds more deception, and is not confined to just one specific element. Like a cancer, it grows and spreads to get a better grip over suppressing the truth and over the host (Rom. 1:18). It infiltrates, entrenches, integrates, and clings with increasing vibrancy and tenacity. Reproduction and strength of a stronghold are gained by sprouting and sending out more and more tentacles of deception to strangle the truth and confuse the issues. Thus, the more strength a stronghold has over a person's life, the more numerous its tentacles, which are embedded in various relating and linked sub-strongholds.

**TO SPREAD:** Correlating to strongholds' driving purpose to take as much ground as possible in a person's life, they are not content to plague just one person. Strongholds use their hosts as spokesmen to "mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice [other] people who are [themselves] just escaping from those who live in error" (2 Pet. 2:18). The hosts promise freedom to potential victims, but bring only enslavement to depravity (2 Pet. 2:19). Strongholds have an insatiable appetite to devour others - to set up strongholds within them. Infected with this appetite for conquest, hosts of strongholds love the company of cohorts. There is strength and mutual encouragement in numbers. It is fun to let one's passions for wickedness burn like wildfire alongside others who have the same passions. Therefore the hosts have an appetite to recruit more cohorts. This is a main reason why your troubled youth is so mysteriously drawn to deviant peers.

## **Realms of Influence**

### The Mind

Another aspect of strongholds that needs to be understood is their realms of influence - what parts of human beings they infect and affect. By definition, strongholds of sin are mainly thought processes or activities of the mind. Because the mind dominates the brain control center for the entire person and makes moral decisions, strongholds as a whole seek to intrude upon, invade, and conquer every aspect of a person's mind in order to acquire the fullest control possible over the person's morality system.

**INTELLECTUAL:** An utmost influence of strongholds is to cloud, confuse, warp, blind, or hamper the intellectual reasoning "thoughts", "attitudes", and activities of the mind so that thinking will be rendered spiritually "foolish" and "darkened" to the truth (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:21). In the mind, strongholds induce: "darkened understanding"; "ignorance"; "hardened hearts" that are characterized by "stupidity or callousness"; "apathy" or "loss of all sensitivity" to righteousness; and psychological craving or "continual lust for more" moral "impurity of every kind" (Eph. 4:17-19, NIV, GRK; Strong's #4457, #0524). The most intelligent and wisest persons in the world can be unawarely entrapped in foolish futile

thinking because of strongholds (Rom. 1:22). At the other end of the spectrum, mentally-challenged persons can also be held captive by intellectual inhibitors (such as confusion, zone out, distraction) emanating from strongholds which reduce their learning capabilities.

**SUBCONSCIOUS:** Strongholds also exert influence in the subconscious mind. When the mind is asleep, dreams can be affected by strongholds. A common example of this is dreams in which sensual desires are acted out. Nightmares spawn from the intensity of fear strongholds. When the mind is awake, painful memories or re-traumatizing vivid flashbacks of the past are at times triggered into present conscious thinking through the workings of strongholds. The intrusions that strongholds execute upon the subconscious mind seemingly occur indiscriminately and irregularly.

**CONSCIENCE:** The conscience or "moral consciousness" is also negatively affected by strongholds, being "corrupted" along with the mind (Titus 1:15, NIV, GRK; Strong's #4893). The stronghold of idolatry "weakens" and "defiles" the conscience (1 Cor. 8:7). The stronghold of sinning against another person can "wound" his conscience (1 Cor. 8:12). For those who abandon the faith to follow false doctrines, the strongholds of speaking lies and living in hypocrisy "sear" the conscience "as with a hot iron", "rendering it insensitive" (1 Tim. 4:1-2, NIV, GRK; Strong's #2743). A searing or desensitizing of the conscience ensues anytime a person feeds a stronghold through engaging in gross sin (especially prolonged or repeated engaging), because God "gives them over in the sinful desires of their hearts" to the control and effects of the stronghold (Rom. 1:24). Examples of strongholds that are linked to a degradation of one's conscience are: cruelty; substance abuse; violence; pyromania; gangbanging; rape; prostitution; child abuse; kidnapping; and murder.

**EMOTIONAL:** Perhaps the most favorite aspect of the mind for strongholds to influence is the emotions. Emotions color and influence nearly all of our thinking. Moreover, emotions prompt and incite us into action. Our thinking is quite sensitive and reactionary to our emotions, and frequently we have little or no control over them. Therefore, we are extremely vulnerable to manipulation of our emotions or harassment through them.

One way strongholds gain a grip on us through our emotions is by taking advantage of emotional excitability or weaknesses. Through our emotions, strongholds love to impel us into hasty action with little forethought, pondering, or calm, balanced reasoning. A biblical proverb that describes this well is, "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil" (Prov. 15:28). The righteous person keeps his emotions in check, "disciplined", and under "self-control" (Titus 1:7-8) so that he can "slowly" (Jam. 1:19) "ponder" and "study" his answers with thoroughness and care before speaking (Prov. 15:28, GRK; Strong's #1897). In contrast, the person controlled by strongholds of sin does not hesitate to "gush forth" from his sinful thinking with virtually no regard as to how his emotions are affecting his cognitive processes (Prov. 15:28, GRK; Strong's #5042). A healthy, righteous relationship with God is based foremost upon faith, truth, obedience, and reasoning. Trailing behind in subservience should be feelings and emotions, which are fleeting, unreliable, and frequently self-manufactured or manipulated by strongholds. Some examples of common areas in which strongholds can carry a person away in his emotions are: anger; crying; grouchy; yelling; giddy; ecstasy; excitement; hyper; and laughing.

**WILL:** As I have previously discussed in numerous ways, strongholds desire to get a strong hold upon the person's will in order to force indulgence in sin. They interact with the mind in such a way as to take over and remove a person's mental ability to make un-influenced conscious choices at his own discretion. Strongholds aggressively "wage war against" a person's will, which wants to do what is right (Rom. 7:22-23).

From birth, humans are by nature under sin's dominating power and control of the will (Rom. 8:1-8). Unbelievers are devoid of the power to control their own will (Rom. 8:7). Strongholds are so successful in this battle over the will that they are even able to overpower a righteous believer's mind that is willingly enslaved to obeying God's laws (Rom. 7:22,25). Strongholds can prevent that righteous-minded person from carrying out the good he desires to do, and force him to commit sinfulness that he hates to do (Rom. 7:18,15)! This helps explain (but not excuse) why many renowned, spiritually stalwart pastors fall into sinful bondage, which then disgraces Christ and extensively damages the Church. This also enlightens as to why many believers lead a spiritually unfruitful life in defeat and captivity to personal

strongholds they hate doing. They have never been able to adequately draw upon God's power to break their strongholds' covert compulsive grips over their wills.

### The Body

The influences that strongholds have over the body are extraordinarily interesting and may be initially surprising to you, particularly because of our upbringing with an empirical modern Western-civilization worldview. In our culture, the view widely accepted by unbelievers and believers alike is that all medical problems have absolutely no relation to or connection with religious problems. Instead, all medical problems have some sort of biological problem at their source - many of which still need to be discovered on a genetic, cellular, or chemical level. While it is understandable that unbelievers hold this view, it is sad that believers miss so many opportunities to facilitate healing through spiritual means because we are scripturally uninformed in this respect.

**PHYSICAL:** According to the Scriptures and Jesus Himself, strongholds of sin can cause physical sickness (1 Cor. 11:27-30; Mrk. 2:1-12; Jam. 5:14-16). One irrefutable declaration of this reality is found in John 5:1-15 in which Jesus healed a man who had been "an invalid for thirty-eight years" (v.5). This man lived on a mat next to the pool of Bethesda beside many other "disabled people" (vv.2,6,8,3). He was physically unable to get himself into the pool fast enough before someone else got there ahead of him (v.7). From his conversation with Jesus, it can be determined that mentally he was coherent and intelligent (v.7). But, physically he was "feeble", "frail", and "sick" with a chronic illness or disability which confined him to living on a mat (v.5, GRK; Strong's #0769).

"When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him" a seemingly bizarre question, "Do you want to get well?" (v.6). Think about this for a second. This man had been living incapacitated on a mat for 38 years, and Jesus asks him if he desires to be healed! Of course the man wants to be healed - or maybe not!?

There is more to his problem than just physical incapacitation. Jesus asked him this question because the man was engaging in some type of sin that was causing his incapacitation (v.14). And through this unusual question, Jesus was also asking him if he wanted to give up his sin too. Jesus distinctly declared in verse 14 that there is a direct cause-and-effect connection between this man's moral sinfulness and his physical sickness. After healing the man, Jesus found him later and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (v.14). Jesus is stoutly warning the man that his sin caused him to be an invalid on a mat for 38 years, and that if he does not stop sinning, the man could end up in even a worse condition than before. Now obviously, engaging in sin does not always produce physical sickness, nor is all sickness the result of sin (Jn. 9:1-3). But, whatever sin(s) this man was doing, he definitely had been suffering adverse physical effects because of it.

**MEDICAL:** In the Bible, there are accounts given in which medical conditions such as convulsions or seizures, deafness, muteness, blindness, hunchback, and infirmity (weakness) had a spiritual cause in those particular cases. In contemplating any correlations between strongholds of sin and medical conditions, several possibilities arise.

One plausible possibility is that strongholds of sin might actually cause medical problems, diseases, or conditions. Or, they could cause sickness that mimics medical conditions. Another possibility is that strongholds might try to hide behind and take advantage of weaknesses created by actual medical conditions. Strongholds could also exert symptoms of sickness in a variety of combinations of both the body and the mind. Because they reside in the mind, which is the control center of the entire body, strongholds can theoretically manifest themselves through any complexity of intermixing and interconnection of the mind, the body, thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, perceptions, and etc. Whatever the case, the problem is that there is no clear-cut way to ascertain solely through theological studies or through medical testing what effects strongholds are having on a person's health.

The common mistake to avoid, however, is not to assume that the sickness is purely a medical problem. Even when there is overwhelming convincing medical evidence, how can anyone say with absolute certainty that a stronghold is not involved somehow with the presenting sickness? God does use weakness, sickness, and even death to discipline and/or bring judgment upon those who refuse to repent from their sinful indulging (1 Cor. 11:27-32). When God gives a person over to their sinful indulgence and thinking, He may be allowing and using strongholds of sin to bring physical harm upon that person

for His disciplining or judging purposes (Rom. 1:26,28).

What I find astounding is when believing parents doggedly cling to the hope that medical or psychiatric science will eventually cure their child's condition, while giving absolutely no credence to the possibility that the condition may have a spiritual cause. Ignoring the possibility that repentance, confession, and prayer are what is really needed (Jam. 5:14-16), they instead earnestly pray for an instantaneous miraculous healing. But when God does not supply one, the parents assume that God has not theologically prescribed any other Scriptural course of action to facilitate healing. So they proceed to limit God and become close-minded to any treatment other than medical or psychiatric science. They put all their faith in science thereafter and resolve to live with the condition as best as they can.

I want to quickly point out, though, that medical treatment should not be omitted as a remedy for sicknesses just as spiritual treatment should not be omitted either. In James 5:14-16, the Word of God conceivably advises that both remedies be pursued simultaneously, with adequate emphasis always being given to the spiritual remedy. If the spiritual remedy works, needless medical bills and prolonged suffering have been averted. Considering these potential beneficial outcomes, it seems more prudent to pursue a spiritual remedy as a first resort, rather than a last resort after all else has failed.

**THE LIST:** During my counseling in group homes, I compiled a list of strongholds which I witnessed in the girls' lives, or in the lives of my family members or myself. I have enclosed this list in Appendix A in *Children of Fire*. This list is restricted to only strongholds that responded to and were successfully removed solely through biblical counseling. This list is not intended to be scientific, nor to be exhaustive. It is just a list that I accumulated from my own field observations.

I first started keeping the list because I naively thought that there would be perhaps only a few dozen items total, and I would want that list as a handy reference when doing counseling with other girls in the future. As the list quickly grew, I became amazed at how numerous, varietal, and specific strongholds were. I also was pleasantly surprised each time a medical problem was completely removed exclusively through biblical counseling.

Take some time to slowly review each item on the list in Appendix A. Later in this book, I will be suggesting how to further utilize this list. For now, notice the objectives and influences of these strongholds. Notice also the range of intensity they have - from the mild (like sadness) to the horrific (like murder).

I would like to mention here the medical conditions that were cured exclusively through biblical counseling: asthma; burping; dyslexia (mixed up or backwards writing or reading); cerebral palsy; hiccups; hunger; eye problems (cross-eyed; divergent or split-eyed; tunnel vision; blurred vision; pink eye); fainting; abnormal yellowish lump under the skin; false illness; the itches; odor (body, breath); paralysis; physical pain; retardation; shakes; speech problems (pronunciation problems, speech mix up); stomachache; too frequent urination; vomiting; and weakness. Nearly all of these medical conditions were officially diagnosed by medical doctors because we were required to take our group home girls to the doctor for every malady.

As would be expected, our girls' school grades took an immediate hefty leap upwards when they were delivered from the strongholds (medical and/or psychological) that hindered their learning. Usually their grades for all classes would jump 1 whole letter grade in the first quarter after being freed, and then climb steadily thereafter to plateau where they were consistently getting all A's and B's.

**CASE STUDY:** Even though I could write lengthy fascinating true stories about the deliverance results our girls experienced from these medical conditions, I would like to focus on just one. Amy (I have changed her name here to protect her identity) was a 12 year old slender girl with a below average I.Q. Her unkempt appearance and messy brown straight hair accurately reflected her disorganized life and continuous uncontrollable behaviors.

One feature in Amy's appearance that took some getting use to was that one eye was always turned inward - and usually to an extreme. During her frequent rages, this made it difficult to read her eyes in order to gauge her temperament. Yearly visits to the eye doctor produced no change in this eye condition.

Over time, we were able to share the gospel with Amy, to which she responded one day by placing her faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. As Amy subsequently started growing in the disciplines of the faith, I noticed that there were now occurring occasions when that convergent eye was aligned properly with the



good eye. So, alerting my wife and other staff to this intriguing phenomenon, I began tracking and noting the circumstances within which alignment was occurring. It did not take long for me to discover a pattern. When Amy was living her life right with the Lord and yielding to His control, her convergent eye was properly aligned, behaving normally, and under control. When Amy was out of control or in a rage, her convergent eye was out of control and turned extremely inward. This pattern was so consistent in Amy that we could accurately predict Amy's current state of mind just by observing what her convergent eye was doing.

In my analysis from countless hours of personal interaction with Amy, I think that a powerful stronghold of being 'out of control' had a formidable command over both her life and her eye. Unquestionably, this stronghold developed as a result of Amy being abandoned and abused by her drug-addicted mother. After getting saved, the power of the Lord was overpowering this stronghold whenever Amy was collaborating with the Lord. Conversely, the stronghold would erupt to spew forth its fiery corruption whenever Amy collaborated with it by choosing to be out of control. Amy was unwilling to deal with the root reasons the stronghold remained in her life, and it was still there the last time I saw Amy, when she was prematurely moved to another group home against our recommendations.

### III. Getting to the Heart of The Problem (cont.)

#### Chapter 6: Origins and Treatment of Strongholds

As we become fully immersed in our study of the nature of strongholds, I do not want to overemphasize the concept of strongholds so that some readers might be tempted to take it out of proportion or to formulate some new erroneous theology based upon this concept. My intent is to give you a visual way to understand how sin effects people, while adhering tightly to proper biblical interpretation and applying biblical principles. There are other biblically-correct ways to conceptualize the effects of sin, but I am choosing to discuss only this stronghold approach because I think both you and your troubled youth can more readily accept, understand, digest, and successfully implement this approach.

In the previous chapter, perhaps you were able to see many negative qualities within your own life and your child's life that correlate with the objectives and influences of strongholds. During the study in this chapter, more light bulbs may come on as you piece together why we humans behave the way we do. As you consider or begin applying the principles to your life, it is crucial to remember, however, that this counseling approach does not work for unbelievers, because they lack an actual relationship with the Lord. If you are not a believer yet, you can nevertheless continue reading through *Children of Fire* to evaluate and digest the entire approach, which may then convince you to become a believer and subsequently implement this approach (which works superbly for believers).

#### **Origins of Strongholds**

Strongholds of sin are like hardy weeds in your garden. Cutting a weed off does not get rid of the weed because its root system remains intact, enabling it to continue to grow. You must dig down through the dirt and rocks to the weed's concealed, entrenched root core, and pull out all of the core in order to kill the weed. The bigger the weed is, the bigger the root core is and the tougher it is to pull out. Slicing off part of the root core does set back the weed, but does not kill it. You must dig down to and remove the entire root core that is firmly attached to and fed by its many tentacles. In order for the Lord to deliver a person from a stronghold, He requires that the person adequately deal with the sin(s) that resides in the root core of the stronghold (1 Jn. 1:9). This will necessitate successfully digging, probing, and investigating underneath the surface symptoms, emotions, diversions, and detours down to the root core cause of the stronghold.

##### Inherited:

For strongholds of sin, there are 3 different ways in which root core sins can originate or take root in a person's life. One way is by being inherited. A key passage for inherited or ancestral strongholds is

Exodus 20:1-6:

1. "And God spoke all these words: 2. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3. "You shall have no other gods before me. 4. "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6. but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.""

This passage contains an account of God giving the 10 commandments. Verse 1 identifies God as being the one who is directly pronouncing these commandments and reasonings. Because He is the only true God (v.2), we humans are strictly forbidden from engaging in any type of worship of other gods (idolatry) (vv.3-5). God considers worshiping false gods to be a "perversity" or a divergence away from what is right or good into what is "morally evil" (v.5, GRK; Strong's #5771). Worshiping anything other than God Himself is a blatant act of opposition or "hate" against God (v.5) and outright rebellion against his moral laws (v.6).

As an immediate consequence for becoming involved in idolatry, God decrees in verse 5 that He will cause the perverse moral evil that the parents are engaging in to be passed on to their children, proceeding down through 3-4 generations. In other words, as punishment God will cause the children to inherit their parents' and ancestors' bondages to idolatry and to any sin that has been worshiped as a false god. Conversely, for those people who "love" the Lord and "keep [His] commandments", He promises blessings and love to their progeny for a thousand generations to come (v.6).

**OBSERVABLE TODAY:** Because this decree is extended into the future by God, who has sufficient power and motivation to carry it out, then its results should be evident and identifiable today. Modern social science has repeatedly confirmed that indeed some types of problems are commonly passed on today from one generation to the next, although there is widespread disagreement as to exactly how they are passed on. It is easy to see from ordinary observation of society that idolatrous strongholds such as overeating (worship of food), greed (worship of wealth), alcoholism (worship of alcohol), depression (worship of self-gratification), gangbanging (worship of violence), or sexual promiscuity (worship of sexual pleasure) do indeed run within family lines.

**TENACIOUS:** From my counseling experiences, I have found that inherited strongholds are extremely tenacious, and thereby difficult to get removed quickly. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the inherited strongholds have been overly successful in perpetuating themselves in each succeeding generation without interruption. Another reason probably is that inherited strongholds have approval and facilitation from the Lord to harass the next generation(s) as punishment (Exo. 20:5).

**REMOVAL:** I have several specialized suggestions for taking a stand against inherited strongholds and getting them removed:

-- 1. First, identify your inherited strongholds by examining the lives of your biological parents and grandparents. You can use the list in Appendix A to assist your investigation. [For later use in Chapter 12, trace each stronghold down through yourself and your biological children to determine whom each has passed on to. Also, identify any strongholds that originated in you that already have been passed on to your children. Repeat this investigative procedure for each child's other biological parent. This investigation can produce quite fascinating and intriguing discoveries. It can also help explain the origins of some of your troubled child's behaviors.]

-- 2. Because inherited strongholds typically do not remove easily or quickly, perseverance in resistance and prayer are required (Mrk. 9:29). The person who desires to be free from an inherited stronghold will need to persist in resisting the stronghold through total abstinence. And, daily prayer requesting removal will need to continue until the Lord has granted deliverance (Matt. 6:13). Start a prayer list (if you do not have one), and list each individual inherited stronghold in your life. Every day pray against each one, and ask the Lord to break the power of each individual stronghold over you and deliver you completely from each.

You will know when the Lord has freed you from a particular stronghold when you have gained complete control over the sin, and the sin no longer has any control or a strong hold over you. You should be thereafter consistently and easily able to abstain from doing that sin with minimal struggle. In some cases, you may even totally lose any desire or temptation to engage in that sin ever again.

-- 3. Look for the sinful beliefs, misbeliefs, erroneous doctrinal beliefs, or lies that reside in the root core of the inherited stronghold, and ask the Lord to reveal them. Look also for relating or connected sub-strongholds. Some common misbeliefs you may encounter are: "this is just the way that I am"; "this is part of my personality and who I am"; "its genetically inherited"; "its O.K. for me to do this because my parents do this"; "my parents approve of this"; "I have been doing this all my life"; or "God allows this". Once identified, then apply biblical principles and truth to them. Confess any sins, and repent (change your mind and turn away) from the sins, erroneous beliefs, and lies. Stop engaging in the sinful behaviors and thinking, and replace them with righteous behaviors and thinking. Persevere in earnest prayer.

-- 4. Realize that being delivered of an inherited stronghold will break it from being passed on through you in the future to any new children you may conceive, but does not undo any passing on that has already occurred to your existing biological children. Therefore, you should want to gently and patiently try to help each of your children become free from inherited strongholds, while always remaining fully aware that they got the inherited strongholds from you and their other biological parent!

-- 5. If you were adopted or a foster child, it may be difficult to ascertain the inherited strongholds through examining your biological parents and grandparents because you may not know them very well or at all. An excellent source of information that may help some is any caseworker files. If you can secure a copy of them, you should be able to identify in them several major inherited strongholds.

**CASE STUDY:** Maggie was an intelligent 14 year old who had been adopted as an infant, but she was placed in our group home because she was unmanageable. After observing her for several months, we noticed that Maggie was always trying to take most of her clothes off so that she was provocatively dressed for the boys. Maggie's desire to strip down was so compulsively intense that she would openly take her shirt off in front of the boys - knowing full-well that an adult staff was present and prepared to issue her a very high consequence for doing so. We could not figure out why she was so obsessed with being sexually provocatively dressed in public until we started investigating into her past and found out that Maggie's biological mother was a prostitute. Maggie had inherited the stronghold of prostitution, and at the age of 14 she was in the early stages of beginning to show signs in her behavior of the prostitution stronghold.

#### Abuse:

Another way root core sins can become implanted as a stronghold in a person's life is by picking up the stronghold from an abusive event or an abuser. The various aspects of an abusive event can be readily transmuted into a corresponding variety of different types of strongholds in the victim's life. The type of each stronghold will be either identical to that specific aspect of the abuse event, or will be opposite in reaction to the abuse. For example, a child who was abused physically by her parent may become either physically abusive herself and/or become a compulsive runaway. If the child was whipped mercilessly with a string of Christmas tree lights (this had actually happened to one of our girls), then she may go into a rage of anger every time she sees a set of lights, or she may vehemently refuse to participate in the decorating festivities so that she will not have to look at or handle any sets of lights.

**MATCHING EFFECT:** Typically, the intensity, depth, and strength of an abuse stronghold in the victim's life will generally match the intensity, depth, and strength of the abusive event that had been perpetrated upon the victim. If the intensity of the abuse was too horrific, the person may experience a forgetting of parts or all of the abuse and/or an active repression of the memories in order to maintain sanity, because the torment of the memories are too overwhelming, excruciating, or re-traumatizing. Under the right conditions, horrific abuse can cause the person to develop a fundamental personality defect in order to isolate the trauma and thereby minimize its inhibiting influence upon the person's ability to function sanely. This is particularly true of young children.

**PAST:** Implanted strongholds from and memories of an abuse will continue to torment victims indefinitely even though the event happened a long time ago in the past. Memories of what has been experienced in the past have a direct effect upon the present frame of mind and present response to similar

situations. A strong negative response in the present is frequently empowered by a past harmful experience. A person who is stuck in the past and being held captive by it cannot healthfully dwell in the present nor move forward into the future.

**CONTINUED EFFECT:** Abuse strongholds do not heal and evaporate on their own. They remain intact and operating vibrantly - even if the corresponding memories have since faded over time. Ignoring the implanted abuse strongholds does not get rid of them nor cause them to subside. Likewise, burying the abuse and moving on with life does not diminish the strongholds at all, but rather gives the abuse strongholds opportunity and license to operate covertly.

**UNFORGIVENESS:** For believers, God does not automatically bring deliverance from abuse strongholds, primarily because the victim harbors unforgiveness in his heart. The Lord commands believers to completely forgive others because through Christ, God forgives believers of all of their countless sins (Eph. 4:32). In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus declares that the Lord is so adamant about this absolute requirement to forgive others that He will turn over even His own believers to be "tortured" or "tormented" for not completely forgiving others (vv.34,35, GRK; Strong's #0930). God not only allows but ordains that a person suffer continuing anguish and adverse effects until the person forgives his abuser (v.35). This may sound too harsh for some believers, but Jesus plainly states this in verse 35: ""This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart"". Through the activities of the abuse strongholds, God disciplines believers for not forgiving their abusers. God requires forgiveness even if the forgiveness is only unilateral and with no restitution or apology ever coming from the abuser.

As should be expected then, all treatment methods that omit forgiveness will fall short of totally resolving abuse issues. Unforgiveness (along with relating resentment, bitterness, and anger) is the primary root core problem and the key to resolving abuse issues. Therefore, unforgiveness should always be the very first problem to look for when dealing with abuse strongholds and with various aspects of abuse events. Once the person forgives comprehensively and completely from the heart, the power of the abuse stronghold is greatly and dramatically reduced. Then the Lord usually grants immediate removal of that aspect of the abuse stronghold in response to prayer which: expresses genuine forgiveness of the abuser; repents of engaging in the stronghold; and requests removal by the Lord.

Three other common root core problems of abuse strongholds are: 1. lies that the abuser implants in the victim's thinking while perpetrating the abuse; 2. misperception of the abuse event by the victim; and 3. the victim's retaliation for or reaction to the abuse in a grossly immoral way. Due to this complexity of issues within abuse events, it is necessary to open up the entire event and bring it all to full recall in order to treat every aspect. However, the victim may not be willing or able to recall and disclose all of the details of a traumatic event. To move beyond this impasse requires time for the victim to build trust and confidence in the counseling method and in the Lord as He brings healing to other milder issues. When the victim finally becomes ready to face the painful parts of the abuse, a productive prayer to offer is to verbally ask the Lord to help the victim remember all of the abuse event in a gentle way without being re-traumatized.

**INTRUSIVE MEMORIES:** For severe abuse, victims may experience vivid intrusive memories or flashbacks of the abuse. Flashbacks (and nightmares) are used by strongholds as a tool to harass and inflict pain upon the victim without warning. Despite the recurring pain, this can be substantially beneficial for resolving abuse when it serves to motivate the victim to keep working on the issues in order to have the Lord get rid of the painful flashbacks.

Nightmares and unpleasant dreams can also be generated by an abuse. It is possible for a nightmare to be an actual flashback. Or, they can flow from strongholds of fear, which have been either inherited or implanted through willing experience (watching a horror movie, for example). When trying to get rid of nightmares and disturbing dreams, avoid trying to precisely interpret the dream and the meanings of its various elements, because these are fabricated by the sleeping mind and usually are not based accurately on reality. Instead, focus on the general theme of the dream to determine if there is a link to a stronghold and/or an actual event in the past. In some cases, nightmares are actually inherited strongholds.

**PEACE:** The whole purpose of revisiting abuse in the past is to facilitate the Lord's healing and removal of all associated strongholds. When this is accomplished fully, the victim will be completely at

peace when she thinks about and remembers the entire abuse event. The Lord will not remove the memories, but He will bring peace (Jn. 14:27). If a person is not totally at peace and serene with the abuse, then as the person is ready, further digging should be done to unearth more details within the abuse event in order to identify other associated strongholds or sub-strongholds. If, while working on an abuse, other symptoms are experienced which seem to be unrelated to the abuse event, then this may indicate that there is more to the abuse that has not yet been uncovered. Or, the abuse event has become complexly interwoven with other similar or related types of strongholds or abuse events.

#### Sinful Indulgence:

The third way root core sins can become established as a stronghold in a person's life is by observing or by participating in a sinful indulgence. Depending upon the sin being performed, one instance of merely watching the sin or engaging in the sin can be enough to pick up strongholds from it (witchcraft, for example). Speaking from a spiritual perspective, when a person observes or participates in a sin, he is, by his actions: approving of the sin; willingly opening himself up to that sin; and spiritually allowing any of the dynamics affiliated with that sin to become part of his life. The Word of God exhorts us to "detest utterly" and "hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9, NIV, GRK; Strong's #0655). In 2 Peter 3:17-18, we are warned to "be on your guard so that you may not be carried away" from righteousness into wickedness, and to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" - not grow in the knowledge of evil. We are to keep up our guard against evil - not open ourselves up to it.

**SUSTAINED:** Repeated or prolonged exposure to sinfulness can create and reinforce depraved thinking, and thereby spawn temptations and opportunities for the sinfulness to expand into other areas. Sustained indulgence directly fortifies the strongholds, frequently leading to the development of a habit or an addiction, and to a desensitization of the conscience to what is morally right. Some conspicuous examples are: witnessing a murder; dabbling in magic or witchcraft; living with a smoker; watching sexual or violent movies; or working around an adult who cusses profusely.

**NEEDS:** In the beginning stages before the sinful indulgence becomes a habit or compulsion, the person starts doing the sin because it meets some need or desire the person perceives he has. Youths start smoking to meet the need of fitting in with their peers. Children start cussing in order to meet a need of finding a more dramatic way of getting the adults' attention. Adults start gambling to meet a perceived need of obtaining wealth quickly. We humans want to achieve happiness and enjoyment in life. We think or perceive we need happiness, but really it is only a want - not a need for survival. In today's "entertain me" culture, many youths and adults think they need to be experiencing perpetual happiness. Justifiably in many cases, they think church is dull and boring - no happiness or enjoyment can be found there. So they keep searching until they find some things which bring them happiness and fun. Many of the selections they make involve sinful indulgence. Although they know that what they are doing is morally wrong or harmful, they continue doing them anyways because it is meeting their perceived needs.

Many people (and perhaps your troubled child) do not want to give up their sinful indulgences. Some might - if an attractive acceptable substitute or solution is found which will similarly meet their needs as the sinful indulgence does. In their not-always-rational mind, the benefits of indulging outweigh the immediate consequences and are worth the risk of high consequences or worse. Pointing out all of the consequences of their sinful indulging usually reaps no positive results because they already know what they are being told, and they nevertheless choose to continue the indulgence. As sinful indulgences are identified, a good strategy is to figure out and find out what the corresponding perceived needs are and why the indulgence is being continued. There may be something that can be changed or corrected which will sufficiently motivate a turning away from the indulgence.

**ABSTINENCE:** In treating sinful indulgences, no progress will be made until the person sincerely stops liking the indulgence and is actively resisting it. Total abstinence of the indulgence is more easily accomplished when replaced by righteous thinking and actions. Thinking must be changed towards righteousness, or else eventually the person will return to the indulgence. "Those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority" are like the proverb: "a sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud" (2 Pet. 2:10,22). Patience must be exercised to wait for the Lord to change the person's heart. Before progress can be made, the Lord must soften and convince the person to pursue obedient "godliness with contentment" rather than perpetual happiness (1 Tim 6:6).

**PARAPHERNALIA:** When repentance and confession of a sinful indulgence does finally happen, then submission to God must include getting rid of all paraphernalia that support the indulgence. If for example a person is turning away from pornography, he should (safely) smash and destroy all of the pictures, magazines, videos, and etc. he has been using to perpetuate his sinful indulgence. He has to personally take ownership in this repentance process and be proceeding according to his own free will. Upon successfully cleaning out all of the supporting paraphernalia, then it is important that this void be filled with righteousness that adequately satisfies him and meets his needs. But care must be taken so that his dependence is not transferred onto something that could become spiritually unhealthy.

**LIES:** As with other types of strongholds, again there will be lies or falsehoods to address and to counter with God's truth. Some typical lies for sinful indulgences are: "I've got to have..."; "this isn't hurting anyone"; "its O.K. because everyone else is doing it"; "I can control it"; or "the Bible doesn't specifically say this is a sin". An effective way to battle sinful indulgences is to find at least one easily understood verse in Scriptures that directly addresses the sinful indulgence (see Appendix B). Copy the verse or a key phrase in it onto the person's prayer list and integrate the verse into his daily prayer against the indulgence strongholds. A side benefit to this approach is that through daily reading of the verse, the person is both being reminded directly from God Himself of God's disapproval of his indulgence, and he is memorizing God's Word, which holds the power for change.

**THOROUGHNESS:** When the sinful indulgence is being confessed to God, all of the times or various ways that can be remembered of indulging in that sin in the past should be listed. Likewise, the very first time the sin was engaged in and why at that time the decision was made to do so should be explored in detail and confessed. This may uncover some other issues, abuse, or sins that need to be addressed. There needs to be thoroughness in resolving all aspects of the sinful indulgence - leaving no stragglers and nothing held in reserve or hidden. All nuances of the sinful indulgence need to be confessed for cleansing from 'all' unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9).

**PAST:** The Lord allows the sinful indulgences of the past to continue plaguing a person in the present because He causes "a man [to] reap what he sows" (Gal. 6:7). Sinful actions will produce sinful consequences in the future, and righteous actions will produce righteous benefits in the future (Gal. 6:8). Yes, God forgives a believer of his past sinfulness, but no He does not automatically deliver a believer from its continuing adverse effects, consequences, and strongholds that resulted from his past activities. The past must be revisited to resolve open issues, to address the demand for restitution (unforgiveness), to remove lingering negative emotions (strongholds), and to facilitate spiritual healing of open wounds (cleansing of all unrighteousness - 1 Jn. 1:9). Being freed from the spiritual consequences and emotional baggage of one's past will liberate the person to grow spiritually, "straining toward what is ahead" and pressing on toward the goal God desires (Phil. 3:13-14).

## **Treatment**

**GENERAL STEPS OF TREATMENT:** In overview, the general steps for treatment of strongholds are:

- 1. utilize prayer and the Word of God extensively throughout the entire treatment process;**
- 2. accurately identify the stronghold and dig down to find its root core problem: sin; lie; misbelief; falsehood; misperception; abuse; unforgiveness; or sinful indulgence;**
- 3. believe and apply the truth from God's Word to each sin and its root cause;**
- 4. genuinely repent (change your mind and turn away from it)**
- 5. sincerely confess the sin to the Lord;**
- 6. terminate all involvement with the sin and get rid of all of its trappings and paraphernalia;**
- 7. persistently pray against the stronghold that the Lord would grant victory over it and remove it (Jam. 4:2; Matt. 6:13);**
- 8. put on new righteous thinking and behaviors, and consistently maintain disciplines of the faith: daily personal devotions of prayer and Bible studying; regular church attendance; pursuing holiness and righteous living; growing in the knowledge of basic doctrines of the faith; and serving**

**the Lord;**

**9. stay alert and diligent against indulging in that sin again;**

**10. search for, dig out, identify, and deal with any affiliated or tentacled strongholds and their corresponding root causes, and deal with them in the same manner.**

**DIMINISHING STRENGTH:** The strength of a stronghold responds to treatment and diminishes in the following steps of graduation (which are dependent upon all of the preceding steps):

- Identifying and disliking the stronghold reduces its strength some;

--- recognizing its root core lies weakens it a little more;

----- refusing to believe the lies any longer and believing God's truth dramatically weakens it;

----- terminating all behaviors and thinking associated with the stronghold substantially disarms the stronghold;

----- and, persistently praying against the stronghold will meet all of God's requirements for eventual removal according to His will and timing.

**TREATMENT PITFALLS:** After having attempted this biblical treatment of strongholds, a person may make some apparent initial progress in battling strongholds but then revert back to his old sinful ways. The main reason strongholds remain can be one or more of the following:

1. the person is not truly a believer;

2. the person and/or counselor is not aware the stronghold is present in the person's life;

3. the person does not regard the stronghold as a threat or a problem;

4. the stronghold is too strong or too entrenched to overcome yet;

5. deep down inside, the person loves the stronghold and in reality wants to keep it even though he knows it is wrong; he is not ready to have it removed and he lacks adequate repentance and/or commitment to battle it;

6. the person lacks correct knowledge or strategy of how to get the stronghold removed; he needs competent counselor assistance in getting to the root cause(s) and applying biblical truth to it;

7. the stronghold is inseparably linked or tentacled to other strongholds and root causes or motivations which must be dealt with as well; it is a common mistake to assume that a stronghold has been completely dealt with and is finished being worked on;

8. the person has not been adequately maintaining his devotional life and disciplines of the faith; he has not been putting on new righteous behaviors and thinking to replace the stronghold and/or meet his needs;

9. there is something blocking the process which is either very traumatic, powerful, or compelling, such as: fear of harm to someone; and/or a serious crime has been committed which the person does not want disclosed;

10. there is a hindering issue(s) between the counselee and counselor;

11. the person has a fundamental personality defect; this should be suspected if the person may have endured severe abuse.

**TREATMENT BENEFITS:** Successful treatment of a stronghold that results in the Lord completely removing it should reap the following benefits:

1. deliverance from a problem through spiritual means has occurred with no need for medications or appointments with healthcare professionals;

2. increased peace of mind and general health of the person;

3. increased freedom and ability for the person to make his own choices;

4. temptations in the person's mind have been reduced in their intensity and frequency;

5. conditions in the person's life have become more favorable for better experiencing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), a more abundant spiritual life (Jn. 10:10), and spiritual growth toward maturity;

6. the person has gained some wisdom in how to be delivered from strongholds;

7. the person has first-hand experience of the power of God in his life; in, to, and through the person, the Lord has confirmed the reality of His existence, His willingness to deliver from strongholds, and the active powerful truth of His Word;

8. evidence and knowledge have been added to the person's testimony which could be used to help others;

9. family members, friends, and other people in the life of the person should be enjoying increased

pleasantness and improved relationships with the person;  
10. the person has become morally, physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually stronger - which helps equip the person to better: resist other strongholds; serve the Lord and His church; and earn rewards in heaven.

## **IV. Christ-like Parenting**

### Chapter 7: Modeling Christ-likeness

From our study of strongholds in the previous chapters, you can prepare for working with your troubled child by first tackling your own strongholds and making warranted lifestyle changes. You should be "throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles" you from "running with perseverance the race" God has "marked out for [you]" (Heb. 12:1). Indeed, God has an assignment designated for you - a 'race' that goes far beyond ordinary parenting. Perhaps He is calling you into implementing a multi-faceted ministry to your troubled child. Who will reach your child with the ministry help he needs if you do not? Maybe right now God's hand is upon you. Understanding strongholds should help you 'run with perseverance' because you have a better comprehension of what is plaguing your troubled child.

Also thus far in this book, a foundation has been laid for you to engage in a ministry of power (1 Cor. 4:18-20). You have been equipped with knowledge of how to draw upon God's power in your own life, in your forthcoming ministry to your troubled child and family, and in your child's life. Power will be a critical aspect of your ministry. But it is not the only important aspect.

### **Ministry of Modeling a Christ-like Life**

Indisputably, authentic modeling is a paramount responsibility of good parenting. If there is added to this the vital need for approaching your parenting situation with a distinctly spiritual strategy, then your parenting responsibilities should take on the ministry dimension of modeling a Christ-like life to your troubled child.

A primary objective of modeling a Christ-like life is to live out before your children the reality of the existence of God and what affect that reality has on your life. You want to show them that religion is not about rules, but rather about an intimate personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In every word, thought, and action throughout each day, your life should be reflecting Jesus Christ - the perfect model for our ardent emulation. You are demonstrating to your children how to live life in a way that pleases God, is content with trusting God, and delights in serving God. All that you are as an adult, believer, and parent reveals your intense love and devotion for the Lord. Your life radiates your "love [for] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mrk. 12:30).

Behind the observable exterior part of living out your faith, modeling a Christ-like life also entails subtly demonstrating how to maintain this life of devoted personal relationship with the Lord. You are setting the example and a standard for your children to strive to equal or excel. Your consistency and authenticity in maintaining your close personal relationship with the Lord articulate clearly to your children that your faith is genuine. Your spiritual maturing is overtly noticeable to them, although they may not fully understand it yet. For teenagers, who are by nature attitude experts, your Christ-like attitude speaks loudly to them. They also quickly determine that you habitually keep the disciplines of the faith because you want to, not because you are compelled to. It becomes obvious to them that you are not just going through the motions - that instead you are somehow actually in direct contact with the Lord. As a result, your edifying relationship with the Lord and precipitating peaceful state of mind become attractive and appealing to them, even though your disciplined way of life is not.

As you attempt to restructure your children's morality and value system, through modeling a Christ-like life you are supplying them with tangible good reasons why they should adopt your biblically-based



values and corresponding way of life. They need to see why it is more beneficial to pursue your value system over their own relativistic, self-gratifying system. Things like reading the Bible, praying, yielding to the Lord, attending church, serving in ministry, working on one's strongholds, and maximizing one's relationship with the Lord seem to children to be a lot of work, boring, and sacrificing. Your modeling gives them credible evidence that actions that lead to living a more righteous life are a tremendous blessing to you, as well as to your family.

**SELF-IMPROVEMENT:** This of course assumes that you are actively working on improving your life. Modeling a Christ-like life must include the priority of pursuing spiritual growth and maturity. You must be living a disciplined maturing life in order to teach disciplined maturing living. Maximizing the usage of God's power in ministry requires ongoing spiritual growth and maturing. Your growth as a Bible student will have both a trickle-down and a direct effect upon your children. Therefore, you must be teaching yourself (Rom. 2:21). On a practical note, get and use the resources for growing in the faith. A useful CD-ROM Bible library software program with word search, Greek/Hebrew, several modern translations, topical Bible, cross references, and other helpful features can frequently be purchased at a large discount store for about \$10.

As you become 'more religious', your children will be watching you very closely - particularly to see if you are working on changing unpleasant character qualities and eliminating all hypocrisy in your life and faith. In my secular group home, it always seemed like the girls were watching myself and my wife like a hawk with a magnifying glass and binoculars to catch any flaw in our lives which would give them reason to discredit and dismiss our endorsement of a biblical way of life. I am not perfect, so occasionally they would find an inconsistency between the faith I was verbally promoting and the way I was living. The girls would swoop down on the opportunity to bring this to my attention. No one likes to have their shortcomings brought to their attention, but I found the girls' correct critiques to be quite beneficial in prompting me to straighten out that area of my life. In the ministry of modeling a Christ-like life, you must "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16).

### **Ministry of Modeling Christ-like Parenting**

Modeling a Christ-like life applies to all areas of your life. But a particular area that will most significantly impact your children is your parenting approach. How you interact in a parental capacity with your children and especially your troubled child will exert determining influence over their opinion and regard for your faith. Therefore, your ministry to your children must also incorporate modeling Christ-like parenting.

**BEING A STUDENT:** Given the complexity and responsibility of such a major undertaking as modeling Christ-like parenting, some preparations need to be occurring. Of primary importance is that you restructure your parenting style to be biblical in flavor and should reflect Christ-likeness in its usage. You should be a student of Christ-like parenting - researching and studying passages that give directives or examples of parenting. How God treated Israel is a good topic for gleaning biblical parenting principles. Also, there are available plenty of good books written from a Christian perspective on the basics of adolescence, good parenting, and child-rearing practices. This book, *Children of Fire*, is about how to do Christ-like parenting. You should be trying, experimenting, modifying, adapting, fine-tuning, and putting into regular practice parenting skills that exhibit biblical and Christ-like qualities. As you strive to be the best Christ-like parent that you can, you will be learning from parenting mistakes and experiences, and then adjusting your style to agree with biblical standards. Flexibility and careful consideration will need to be exercised to accommodate changing conditions, such as: your counseling experience; the age and development of your children; family distinctives, structure, activities, and social interaction; culture; and neighborhood.

**ABUNDANT PRAYER:** Preparation for ministering to your children through your parental role should also include establishing a long-term prayer life that makes abundant repeated requests before the Lord. With a yielding heart, you will want to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" for yourself and your children (Eph. 6:18). You can ask the Lord to empower you with the

qualities to be the best Christ-like parent that you can. Individualized specific intercessory prayer for each of your children should also be offered. Abundant prayer is a requisite for accessing God's power in your ministry to your children.

**SUPPORT FROM OTHERS:** Parenting and ministering to a troubled child can be exhausting and draining. To avoid succumbing to burnout, other believers should be recruited for community, moral support, and prayer support. If your spouse is a believer, he/she should be working in conjunction and cooperation with you in your parental ministry endeavors. Because breaking the power and grip of strongholds is accomplished by the power of the Lord, special emphasis of the prayer support should be placed upon praying for the deliverance of your troubled youth. Keep your prayer supporters fresh in their intercessory prayer by regularly updating them about what is happening.

### **Ministry of Patient Endurance**

Ministering to your children through Christ-like parenting utilizes some features that are implemented somewhat differently than for 'normal' children. A glaring example is the need for parental ministering with transcending patient endurance. On perhaps a daily basis, a troubled child easily pushes the adult's patience to the limit and frequently exacts overwhelming suffering through his turmoil. Parental ministering under these conditions requires a gentle long-suffering demeanor that exceeds the abilities of most parents, and therefore must be supplied by the Lord. The constant opposition can only be successfully endured with God's empowering (Heb. 12:3).

**ENDURING FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS:** The patient endurance needed for ministering to a troubled child must be self-sacrificing. It should place the ultimate well-being of the troubled child ahead of the parent's current comfort (2 Cor. 1:6). Enduring in a Christ-like way the distress generated by a troubled child is a demanding preoccupation for the parent. But with one's eyes fixed on Jesus, a ministering parent can endure for the benefit of the child without "growing weary and losing heart" (Heb. 12:2,3). The parent will need to stay focused on the mission in the midst of personal hardship. Career advancement plans may have to be postponed or set aside so that priorities can be restructured to align best with achieving the ministry objectives for the benefit of the troubled child.

**PERSEVERING REGARDLESS OF THE DISMAL OUTLOOK:** Parental ministry also should persevere even when the desired outcome appears solidly unattainable. Godly parenting does not guarantee God-fearing children, and a troubled child enjoys resisting what is right. But, a bleak outlook must not dissuade nor deter the parent's unfaltering determination to persevere. The ministering parent should proceed anyways, with confidence that God now approves of his/her parenting approach and is using him/her to reach the troubled child. He/she knows that the Lord has plenty of power to grant deliverance. The parent must remain on course, having faith that "at the proper time [he/she] will reap a harvest if [he/she] does not give up" (Gal. 6:9). In the Lord there is hope.

**CHANGE IN ATTITUDE:** As you contemplate these qualities intrinsic to parental ministering with patient endurance, you may forthrightly realize that some changes in your attitude are called for in order to cultivate such a noble character. Patient endurance requires the absence of all bitterness, resentment, and anger (Eph. 4:31). Any lingering internal pain caused by your troubled child must be dealt with and released. Embarrassment, shame, family disgrace, humiliation, and any other unpleasantness that still bothers you must be dismissed and discarded from your heart. To avoid thwarting your development of patient endurance, you must resolve before the Lord any remaining issues you have endured from the destructive activities of your troubled child so that your conscience is clear and pure.

**CALM DETACHED RESPONSE:** Troubled youths are extraordinarily adept at 'pushing the buttons' of or provoking parents and adults. They quickly learn what irritates parents and how to incite a heated argument. Children of fire seem to derive immense enjoyment from inflaming their parents and igniting them into behaving just like the troubled youths do.

Maintaining patient endurance under these contentious and hostile conditions is difficult, but not impossible - if you learn to detach yourself from your youth's attacks and wrongdoings. Let his behaviors pass over you without provoking a strong reaction from you. Change your automatic reactions, and do not allow your youth's personal attacks get to you. In the end of the skirmishing and upheaval, you will

prevail. You must rise above what he is doing and calmly respond with Christ-like patient endurance. Rest in the confidence that when you are using a biblical parenting approach, the Lord approves of how you are handling the situation no matter how it will turn out.

**REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS:** Accurately facing the reality of your child's problems, development, and abilities, you must balance and temper your estimation of what your child is capable of being. It is not reasonable, fair, nor justified to expect your child to behave above what is normal for his age. Moreover, when you consider all of the strongholds of sin that powerfully control him, you should anticipate that he will ordinarily behave at a maturity level far below what is normal for his physical age. For the short-term, you should lower your expectations of him because characteristically, the psychological maturity development of a troubled youth is stunted, and it remains that way as long as his strongholds have overwhelming and comprehensive control over him. Personality maturity will start and accelerate as he increasingly becomes victorious over strongholds. Be patient and endure his immaturity for now, because you understand that the Lord must grant him repentance before he will be capable of acting more maturely (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

**POSITIVE REGARD:** Parental ministering with patient endurance also means treating your child with dignity and respect even if he is highly rebellious and defiant. In terms of how you regard your child, the golden rule of "do to others as you would have them do to you" applies (Lk. 6:31). The Lord has made your child in His image (Gen. 1:27). Therefore your child deserves to be treated like a human being even if he is not acting like one. Contempt and disgust will only drive your child further in the wrong direction.

**ONGOING FORGIVENESS:** Unquestionably, troubled youths can be uncaring, cruel, hurtful, malicious, and at times vicious or assaultive. Their parents are conspicuous foremost targets for their wrath because of the parental authority that stands in the way of their rebellion. Depending upon how troubled your child is, verbal and physical harm may be inflicted upon you on a daily basis. In answer to a question about how many times should we forgive someone who is sinning against us, the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 18:21-22 that forgiveness should be perpetually extended. Patient endurance must have an undertone of ongoing immediate forgiveness, regardless of whether any remorse ensues in the perpetrator. It is not easy to quickly forgive when such favor is unwarranted. But this is how God reacts to us believers when we sin against Him. He requires the same reaction of us to sin and harm from our fellow humans.

**READILY RE-ACCEPTING:** Following on the heels of forgiveness should readily come re-acceptance of your abusive youth back into your life and the restoration of fairly normal relations with you. A biblical model for patient endurance with amicable re-acceptance is the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:10-32. In the culture of this parable, the father suffered monumental humiliation and dishonor when his youngest son asked the father for his share of the inheritance (v.12). By asking for his inheritance while his father was still alive, the youngest son was publicly saying, in effect, that he wished his father was dead. By leaving with the inheritance, the youngest son was further publicly disgracing his father by declaring that he no longer wanted to be considered part of the family (v.13). His highly disrespectful actions demonstrated that he would rather live anywhere than with or near his family and his father. Furthermore, squandering his inheritance revealed his total lack of regard for the hard work the father had spent over the years to accumulate that wealth.

As you read and study this parable, notice the father's reaction to the abuses perpetuated by his wayward youngest son. The father was generous and enduring (v.12), patient and watchful (v.20), compassionate and forgiving (v.20), eager and re-accepting (v.20), reaffirming and loving (v.20), restorative and rejoicing (v.22-24). Parental ministering with patient endurance involves putting up with all the garbage being spewed out by your child in hope that one day he will "come to his senses" (v.17). Readily and repeatedly re-accepting your child is part of the way you live out your love for him.

It is important to note that re-acceptance does not necessarily imply or include completely returning to the way things were and pretending that nothing ever happened. The father restored his prodigal son to his former position within the family, but he did not replace his squandered inheritance (vv.22,24). The responsible older brother would receive all of the father's remaining wealth (v.31). Motivated by love, the parent should make and apply necessary adjustments, precautions, and consequences in the midst of re-

acceptance and restoration.

#### IV. Christ-like Parenting (cont.)

##### Chapter 8: Interacting With Love

Modeling a Christ-like life and modeling a Christ-like parent with patient endurance form the foundation for parenting in a Christ-like way. Resting on this foundation should be the virtue of love, from which all parenting activities stem. To maximize effectiveness, love should always be the dominant influence in your interactions with, parenting of, and ministering to your troubled child.

##### **Ministry of Love**

**ATTITUDE OF LOVE:** Love should be interwoven into and permeate every aspect of your parenting (1 Cor. 13:1). Your attitude, your thoughts, your decisions, your intentions, your facial expressions, your body language, your actions, your reactions, your tone of voice, your words - everything you are as a parent to your troubled child must be saturated with Christ-like love for your child. When your child is standing nose-to-nose with you, his eyes burning with fiery anger, and he is cussing you out with scorching vulgarity, thoughts must well up from deep within your soul of how much you love your child and would relish giving him a long hug right now to love him through this terrible time. This is the kind of love Jesus had while hanging on the cross for those who crucified Him (Lk. 23:33-34).

Christ-like love is not a gushy love nor a blind love. It is a balanced, moderate, tempered kind of love. This love seeks to achieve what is necessary and right in the long run despite the discomfort, and does not merely keep patching over problems for quick relief.

Many parents of troubled youths have buried issues that hinder them from cultivating a Christ-like love. Resentment can remain smoldering for years about the unplanned pregnancy of this unwanted child. Disappointment and disenchantment about un-reached expectations for this child can subtly quench the parent's love. Perhaps long ago you desperately wanted and laid sophisticated plans for a boy, only to have them obliterated by the arrival of a girl. Do a soul search and work on getting removed anything that is obstructing a pure, Christ-like love for your seemingly 'unlovable' child. Your child is "a heritage from the Lord, ...a reward from him" (Ps. 127:3). With the Lord's help, develop a new right heart-attitude of love.

**ATTENTION:** Many parents of troubled youths fail miserably to detect or properly respond to one supreme good-parenting essential:

**\*\*\* What troubled youths crave most is their parents' accepting love and positive attention. \*\*\***

The main reason that children act out in a negative way is because they are not getting enough parental (or adult) loving attention. Even the most extremely anti-social teenagers long for positive adult attention, but they have erected a hedge of protection to keep out further potential hurt and pain from abusive or disrupted adult relationships. They want and need an adult to pay attention to them for proper development of self-worth, identity, personality, acceptance, reassurance, security, guidance, and etc. Voluntary parental attention signifies to the child that the parent cares about him. Some troubled children so hunger for adult attention that they will deliberately incite severe negative adult attention rather than receive no adult attention at all.

Analysis of this phenomenon reveals that it originates from the parents' abuse of their child through neglect and/or abandonment. The father got the mother pregnant and then moved away or divorced her. Raising the children by herself and simultaneously trying to hold a job, the mother does not have enough time or energy to devote the attention that is needed for each child. A parent who is totally absorbed and consumed with building a career or fortune also produces neglect abuse. Selfish disregard, irresponsibility, materialism, and busyness are the major propagating culprits of the widespread parental

neglect abuse in our society today. In reaction to this abuse, the child picks up strongholds that demand the attention he has been deprived of for so long by his parents.

**AFFIRMATION:** It is healthy and necessary for children to receive loving affirmation from their parents. Genuine accurate statements of praise are highly valued. Regular communication of parental acceptance, approval, esteem, and appreciation are priceless in edifying, molding, and shaping the healthy development of a child. In your parenting, make genuine loving affirmation a daily habit. If you feel disdain or apathy for this, then dig out the reasons why. A possible source may be that this is how your parents mistreated you. Incidentally, genuine affirmation of love from the parent to the child tends to disarm his hostility. So you have a lot to gain by changing this area of your parenting.

**DAILY QUALITY INTERACTION:** Parental ministering to your troubled child must contain daily interaction with him that is authentic and not superficial. The familiar scenario of Dad reading the paper and responding with "Uh-huh" to his teenager's account of his day at school is not quality interaction. Troubled youths need intelligent conversation and undivided attention with each parent every day for a combined total of at least 20 minutes per parent. If you do not give them this minimum, they will find undesirable ways to demand it.

Some parents and house parents properly recognize that their child is intentionally having negative behaviors in order to receive attention. But, they prescribe the wrong remedy of withholding attention, which consequently produces the opposite effect of the child initiating more negative behaviors. A correct approach is to try to wean the child off of receiving attention through his negative behaviors. This can be done by telling him that you will give him attention as soon as he is being appropriate - and then doing so right away when he is acting appropriately. This demonstrates to him that your interaction with him can be mutually enjoyable when he is acting positively. Of course you will want to point this benefit out to him as it is occurring so that he sees it. Eventually when he is ready, you will want to work with him on spiritually getting rid of the stronghold of demanding attention, being sure to dig out its root core cause(s).

Daily quality interaction should be meaningful to both you and your child. It should be a balanced, two-way, mutually amicable and edifying interaction. As the parent, you should listen and ask questions more than you should do the talking. The objective with this is to get your child to open up about his life and to freely share with you the joys as well as the sorrows, the pleasures as well as the hurts, the fun as well as the crises, the hopes as well as the worries. He needs to feel comfortable venting with you about the frustrations and disappointments of life. Through this daily sharing and learning what is happening in his life, you will be bonding with your troubled child. His respect for you will be strengthening, and he will be subliminally learning how to interpret, handle, and cope with life from the quality interaction he has been having with you. If done with sensitivity and love, these conditions will naturally create 'teachable moments' - a brief time in which your child is willing to listen to you and adopt what you are trying to teach him.

Initially, this interaction will be one-sided in terms of the speaking of truth. Your troubled child will deceptively try to paint himself as an upstanding and perhaps perfect person who never intentionally does anything wrong. You must patiently bear with and correct his compulsive lying. Be mindful that not telling the truth is a major stronghold in his life and you are not about to change it with a few nice conversations. Use good judgment on whether to issue him a consequence for lying to you during this quality interaction time, because you want to keep the information flowing from him. If he gets disciplined every time he talks with you, he will obviously want to remain secretive and stop the interactions.

Interaction with complete truthfulness is an utmost priority for a healthy parent-child relationship. Your side of the conversation with him must always be truthful if you are going to expect him to always be truthful with you. Similarly, your modeling the speaking of truth in daily life is equally important. Your failure to consistently model the speaking of truth will result in you teaching him to lie. You will also be sending him the messages that you cannot be trusted and that it is acceptable to lie at times to suit one's purposes.

Children are deeply hurt by their parents' lies and hollow promises. During my house parenting days, I was astounded by how often parents lied to and deliberately mislead their troubled children. Then the

parents would wonder why their child is incorrigible and complain that they could never get the truth from their child. When our group home girls discovered that their parent(s) had lied to them and/or were breaking a promise, invariably the devastated girls would fly into a rage and for days or weeks take their anger out on other adult authority-figures in their life. Parents should never, ever, lie to their children - or to anyone else for that matter. The biblical command is that "...each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor..." (Eph. 4:25). Even lying to them with good intentions about such things as 'Santa Clause', the 'Tooth Fairy', the dentist, the doctor, a forthcoming consequence, and etc. should never be done. Christ-like parenting must consistently model speaking the truth and keeping promises. "Simply let your `Yes' be `Yes,' and your `No,' `No'" (Matt. 5:37a).

Maybe, not always speaking the truth to your child is a stronghold in your life. Monitor yourself as you interact with him. Identify any other of your shortcomings or your inability to relate well with him.

During your daily quality interaction, you should study your child. Closely observe and carefully note such things as his motives, his inner character, what makes him tick, what gets him ticked off, what he values in life, and what his aspirations are. Learn as intimately as possible what his world is like and what kinds of daily experiences are important to or impacting upon him. Try to view life from his perspective. Be a diligent student of your troubled child, because this information and understanding you accumulate will one day prove invaluable when the time comes to counsel him through his problems and his strongholds.

I have found that a really good time to interact with a troubled child is right away when she comes home from school. A majority of her life revolves around what happens in school. Everything is fresh in her mind after school and she now has time to process the day's events. Therefore, she is usually quite talkative and eager to share an account of her day. Also, this is the best time to deal with and diffuse reactions to adversity in her life before they build or vent destructively. Remember that her world and daily experiences are important to her even though they may be trivial to you. As she discloses her day with you, watch for and seize upon teachable moments in a loving manner.

Another almost-as-good time for quality interaction is while you are cooking or during supper - but the television must be off. Watching television together never suffices as quality time because the attention is focused on the television and not on each other. So, shut the stupid television off during meals and talk to your children! If you are interacting with more than one child at the same time (during a meal for example), then this is group quality time and does not count as individual quality time.

Find some mutually-pleasurable healthy activities you can do together one-on-one. Common examples are boys enjoy playing basketball, and girls enjoy having their hair styled. Ideally, the activity should be conducive to simultaneous casual conversation, like putting jigsaw puzzles together. Playing sports together can foster bonding, but avoid recreation in which you are yelling at your child to play better. This is self-defeating to your relationship-building purposes. On a related note, it is usually unwise to expect a troubled youth to become proficient in any sport. For many, their numerous powerful strongholds relating to being out-of-control prevent them from being self-disciplined enough to get good at a sport. Also, some of their strongholds may be exerting physical symptoms that hinder their athletic development, such as being cross-eyed or split-eyed will make judging distances very difficult. Nevertheless, their athletic accomplishments are important to them; so your attention, observation and acknowledgment of their athletic accomplishments is quality interaction for them.

If done correctly, humor can be quite effective in breaking down hostilities. Join in the playful harmless pranks of your child (and his/her friends). My bonding with our group home girls accelerated significantly on occasions when I let them do such things as put makeup on me, smear shaving cream on me, or have water fights with me on hot days. Find or invent appropriate fun things to do with your children. Learn how to play with them on their level. Take the time, and make the time enjoyable for both or all of you. Do not be annoyed or bothered by them and want to repulse them. Enjoy, relish, and cherish their presence, their company, their interaction, and their relationship with you. You might even discover that having a teenager, albeit a troubled one, in your home can be fun. And, they will discover that they like having you as their parent - that there are appropriate ways for them to have fun with you and by themselves.

One fun and enlightening game to occasionally play is 'role reversal'. This is where you reverse roles

with your troubled child for a short period of time (about 2 hours maximum). Within limits, your child assumes your role as the parent, and you become him, the troubled youth. He gets to act like you, and you get to act like him. Playing this game helps him to experience, from a parental-like perspective, how difficult it is to manage the negative behaviors of a troubled youth. It also gives you a first-hand look at how he regards your parenting style.

**TOUCH:** Appropriate touch is important to the daily giving of attention, and it is particularly useful in reaffirming your love, acceptance, and desire to restore amicable relations with the troubled child after a rupture of the relationship. The Lord Jesus engaged in touching children as a means of encouragement and blessing (Matt. 19:13-14). Due to perceived attention deprivation, younger troubled children thrive on appropriate physical affirmation of love through side-hugs, pats on the head, hand-to-hand contact, and sitting side-by-side. Which of these you should use is dependant upon the child, his age, and his/her preferences. As children transition into their teenage years, though, they progressively need and desire less affirmation through touch from an adult, yet they still appreciate verbal affirmation.

**COMMUNICATION:** The quality of daily interaction is dependent upon how you are communicating with your youth. Both your physical and verbal communication send messages which are perceived and interpreted either favorably or unfavorably. Be sensitive and loving in your communication. Notice, highlight, and draw out the good in him and the good things he does. Use appropriate, edifying humor to foster bonding and reduce tension. Engage him in conversation at a level that matches his age and maturity.

Due to the influences of their strongholds, troubled youths typically have substantial difficulties with exercising good communication skills. They frequently do not interpret communication correctly, and they hastily jump to conclusions because they are unteachable and defiant. At times, they do not know what constructive thing to say, so they blurt out something stupid or antagonistic which popped into their head (from a stronghold) without thinking first. Also, they struggle to identify and articulate their thoughts and feelings in a calm manner. When your child does communicate harshly or incongruently, keep these deficiencies in mind and patiently prompt him to rephrase the statement. On your end of the communication, learn to accurately read the true messages under the surface of his complaints and comments. Ask clarifying questions and be careful not to assume.

**GETTING ALONG AS A FAMILY:** Troubled youths are like sponges - they will soak up as much attention as you give them. This creates competition for your time. If there are siblings in your home, inevitably the competition will escalate into acidic rivalry for your attention and favor. Consequently, you must be vigilant to balance your attention time between all of your children and your spouse so that no one is being neglected. Be careful to always avoid making demeaning comparisons and showing favoritism among siblings, but it is acceptable to continuously acknowledge and reward good behaviors (Jam. 2:1).

All children want their family life to be happy, cohesive, loving, and harmonious. Due to an innate sense of insecurity and their propensity to readily wander off into delinquency, troubled youths especially need this kind of home life to keep them off the streets, to foster personal development, and to regulate exposure to temptations. A home filled with turmoil, boredom, or criticism will drive them to the company of other behavior-disordered peers. Therefore, you must do everything within your abilities to keep your family atmosphere generally pleasant and appealing. Relationships within your family must be intentionally cultivated every day or they will wither and polarize.

**REFRAINING FROM HARMFUL INTERACTION:** There are times when a troubled child gets the parent really agitated and provoked into lashing out at him with a verbal barrage. Lecturing, barking, harping, scolding, yelling, threatening, sarcasm, being critical, cutting remarks, and arguing are never effective in bringing about positive change in children. In an attempt to establish authority, some parents further resort to physical threats, slapping, punching, kicking in the posterior, or making hurtful physical contact to sexual areas. These kinds of parental verbal and physical abusive responses backfire to harden children against the parent and to plant more strongholds within them.

Some responses parents use may be harmful even though they are meant as humorous or jesting. Flippant remarks, insinuations, disguised insults, crude joking, demeaning comments, obscenities, and derogatory names, such as 'Stupid' or 'Clumsy', are never appreciated by the targeted receiver despite

whatever impressions may be outwardly shown. Nagging or giving an impromptu rebuking-lecturing type of sermon will also prove to be counterproductive.

It is "improper for God's holy people" to participate in "obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking" (Eph. 5:3,4). We are explicitly instructed to: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29). This is a good verse to memorize for yourself and for future use with your troubled child. Let your speech always be filled with kindness and compassion (Eph. 4:32). Ministering with love as a parent demands that you keep "a tight rein on [your] tongue" (Jam. 1:26). Self-monitor your speech and accompanying intentions. Let love pervade all your interactions.

#### IV. Christ-like Parenting (cont.)

##### Chapter 9: Balanced Discipline

Discipline is important interaction and responsibility of parenting. By its nature, disciplining imparts tremendous influence upon the development of one's child. Parents who are significantly deficient in administering appropriate discipline will produce conditions fertile for the development of a troubled child. The counterproductive disciplining methods that these parents utilize vary widely, with no one particular method being predominant. These parents formulate their method from their own: understanding; experiences; perceived results; or preferences to what suits them the best. Many of these parents love their children, but their disciplining approach is seriously flawed nonetheless.

The Word of God has much to say about how to properly discipline one's children. Clearly, discipline is prescribed: "Discipline your son, for in that there is hope" (Prov. 19:18); and "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul" (Prov. 29:17). Discipline eventually "produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). Failing to discipline is warned against: "Do not withhold discipline from a child" (Prov. 23:13); and "He who spares..." discipline "hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24).

LOVE: As Proverbs 13:24 describes, love should be the supreme quality which motivates and saturates the use of discipline. Discipline is administered because the parent loves the child and wants him to develop appropriate behaviors. Love motivates taking care to, or being earnest and diligent to, watch for situations that necessitate the use of discipline (Prov. 13:24, GRK; Strong's #7836). If the discipline is to be effective and have value, love must be present in all aspects of the discipline (1 Cor. 1:1-7). Love also controls and governs how the discipline is implemented (Col. 3:21).

ACCOUNTABILITY: Love requires that discipline be implemented in order to hold the child accountable. If the parent loves the child, discipline for accountability will be administered despite the unpleasantness. Minimizing or excusing a child's negative behaviors are contrary to these biblical directives, and ultimately perpetuate more behaviors. In Proverbs 22:15, imagery of using forcefulness in disciplining is distinctly portrayed: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). Thus, biblical parental discipline mandates getting tough, while maintaining an overriding attitude of love, to hold the child accountable for his actions through the application of unpleasant discipline. This can be referred to as 'Tough Love With Accountability'.

There are limits to how tough the discipline should be. In the Word of God, fathers are warned: "do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (Col. 3:21); and "do not exasperate your children" (Eph. 6:4). Christ-like parenting should not employ harsh or immoderate discipline which would "stir", "stimulate", arouse, "irritate", "provoke", or "move" a child to develop bitterness, resentment, or anger (Eph. 6:4, GRK; Strong's #3949; Col. 3:21, GRK; Strong's #2042). Troubled youths are particularly provoked by unfair treatment and discipline. Discipline should always be fair, just, current, and warranted so that the child can realize that he is being disciplined for the purpose of correcting his behavior, and not for the purpose of the parent striking back at him or venting anger.

BALANCED: It is extraordinarily difficult to maintain a healthy balance in disciplining a troubled youth. His constant countless inappropriate actions call for constant disciplining. But, such a disciplining approach that yields continuous reprimands would overwhelm and exasperate the child. Conversely, to



allow the negative behaviors to go undisciplined would serve to condone his inappropriate actions. Permissive-ism does not equal love, and neither does being overly strict. Therefore, a balance must be arrived at and consistently upheld. A good guiding general principle is to verbally prompt the troubled child on the smaller, less-serious infractions, and issue disciplinary consequences on the bigger, more-serious behaviors. In other words, tackle the big forest fires first before trying to put out all of the numerous little grass fires. Verbal identification of small behaviors will draw attention to their unacceptability while simultaneously extending undeserved mercy. Disciplining serious behaviors sends a message that there is a limit to what will be tolerated, and that the child needs to be disciplined to benefit his own personal development.

**SETTING LIMITS:** When setting limits, be careful not to become autocratic or too rigid, nor wishy-washy or too permissive. Again, implement a moderate balance that is always characterized by fairness, and is flexible as necessitated by unusual circumstances. You will find that your limits will need to be adjusted from time to time. But make these adjustments when the playing field is calm - when the adjustments have no immediate impact on current ongoing disciplinary actions. Never compromise your limits or allow limits to be circumvented so that your troubled child can escape or postpone a disciplinary consequence in order to participate in some super-fun activity. Changing the rules in the middle of the game will take the teeth out of the discipline, reduce it to a mere inconsequential formality, and totally negate both present and future accountability endeavors.

**PARENTAL AUTHORITY:** Establishing a fair-handed, balanced approach to discipline will build your child's respect for you and for your parental authority (Heb. 12:9). If you are converting from a strict or harsh disciplining approach, your new 'Tough Love With Accountability' approach will be welcomed as a relief. If you are changing from a permissive approach, the first few months will be rough going until your troubled child realizes that you are firmly determined to hereafter institute tough love with accountability. Ride out the storm and hang in there. He will strongly object to the increase in accountability, but you must persevere, with the expectation that he will eventually grow accustomed to it. Remember that you have responsibility before God to adequately and properly discipline your child.

In your implementation of discipline, inevitably you will encounter major disagreements with your spouse about when and how to discipline. You must together present a harmonious united front in order to retain parental authority. When one spouse is openly un-supportive of the reasonable discipline being administered by the other spouse, the authority of both parents is seriously undermined. Work out your differences in private using principles from the Bible as a guide to disciplining your child. Also, keep in mind that the spouse who was directly involved in an incident will have a fuller grasp and first-hand knowledge of what transpired than the absent spouse will.

Ideally, discipline should be equally initiated and administered by both parents. An imbalance in who does the disciplining creates an aura of one spouse being the 'Candy Man' and the other spouse being the 'Ogre'. Parental authority must be shared, exercised, and supported equally by both spouses. To retain authority, the parent who initiated a disciplinary action should be the one who delivers the consequence. The other spouse should be firmly supportive and should avoid acting as a mediator. In situations in which the initiating parent is being grossly unreasonable, then the other spouse can act as a mediator but only in private with just the unreasonable spouse. If you are not pulling together as parents, you will end up pulling against each other - along with against your troubled child who is actively seeking to capitalize on any weaknesses in your joint disciplinary approach.

**COMMUNICATION:** Implementing the disciplinary process is a confrontational and stressful time. Frequently, emotions are running high. Decisions are being made based upon perceptions and interpretation of known facts. Sometimes, suspicions of undisclosed details or truths are also taken into consideration when administering discipline. Conflict is a natural part of the disciplinary process. Because these natural elements of the discipline process can cloud clear thinking and hinder a sense of justice, communication between spouses needs to be open, clear, and accurate. The better the communication between spouses is, the more fair and effective the discipline will be. Truthfully relay details and facts to each other as they become known. In the middle of behavior crises, hold briefing conferences with each other to create a sort of think-tank for arriving at truth and determining a unified disciplinary strategy. Make it a habit to confidentially keep each other fully informed as you proceed

through a disciplinary process.

Interaction with your child should likewise be factual, truthful, accurate, and clear. Allow, encourage, and practice open sharing and listening without interrupting. Keep your language simple, direct, basic, and brief. Explain concepts and refrain from using big words. You want to cut through the intense emotions your child is having in order to cultivate understanding between you and him regarding the discipline he is receiving. "Because I said so" is not an adequate explanation of a disciplinary consequence.

**RULES:** Discipline is initiated when an infraction of a rule has occurred. To be regarded as fair, rules should be clearly delineated prior to an infraction. Adequate explanations should be given for the reasons a rule is incorporated and for how you expect it to be obeyed. Thoroughly providing explanations and rationales is a prerequisite fundamental way in which you are helping your child become increasingly aware that he is being held responsible for his actions.

When establishing rules, consideration should be given to both the physical age and the maturity level of the child. Within appropriate limits, expect and let the child act according to his physical age. Most of the time for troubled youths though, the maturity level should have priority over physical age in determining and customizing rules. Just because other kids his age get to do something does not necessarily mean that your child is ready to do them too. However, there are some warranted exceptions to this assertion. An example is when a child reaches the physical and legal age of adulthood. Whether he is psychologically ready or not, the parents must allow him to exercise the freedoms, rights, and experiences of becoming an adult. The older teenagers get, the more they yearn to being treated as an adult and to achieve self-sufficiency and independence. Emancipation plays a natural major role in their quest to establish an identity separate from their parents. A preferred way of accomplishing this transition is through a steadily progressive reduction in rules.

Consideration of the maturity level will also need to encompass what strongholds of sin the child has and his inability to control them. An example is: a parent cannot reasonably expect or require a child with the stronghold of restlessness to sit still in church. Try to specifically design rules with the intent of gradually weakening individual strongholds and slowly shaping the child toward acceptable behaviors.

Common sense prescribes that you should avoid requiring your child to keep a rule you are breaking or you are allowing siblings to break. Showing favoritism or being hypocritical are always unacceptable (Jam. 2:1) and may likely generate a stronghold of sin in those who are being slighted. Also, rules that are created and inaugurated in reaction during the heat of battle are probably skewed and out of balance. Consistency, fairness, and reasonableness are key to successfully implementing rules.

**CONFLICT:** "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful" (Heb. 12:11). Troubled youths react adversely to being disciplined (even though they may actually enjoy the negative attention and heated interaction). No matter how nicely the parent tries to present the discipline, a troubled child usually reacts strongly - probably as a form of intimidation in an attempt to weasel out of the deserved consequences. With troubled youths, fiery conflict is inevitable whenever a parent tries to enforce discipline. Yet, conflict should be expected within the family - especially when the parent is modeling Christ-likeness (Lk. 12:51-53).

How you regard and handle conflict will directly affect the results of your disciplining approach. If you loathe conflict, your child will know this and fashion his defenses accordingly to aggressively take advantage of this. Moreover, you will tend to withdraw and acquiesce quickly in an early stage of conflict. Conversely, if you have a disposition that thrives on conflict, then you will tend to lose sensitivity and drag out conflicts far too long.

An excellent perspective to adopt is to regard conflict as an opportunity to grow. Facing trials tests and develops one's character and maturity (Jam. 1:2-4). The sprouting of conflicts offers learning opportunities to enhance one's skills in conflict management, problem-solving, collaboration, and patient endurance. Conflicts are self-convicting in that they help a person become aware of areas in his life that need to be changed and improved. Long-term conflicts can foster a strengthening of one's faith through persevering reliance upon the Lord to bring relief and resolution (Rom. 5:3-4). These types of benefits need the catalyst of conflicts in order to propagate.

A healthy perspective on conflicts should also encompass a loving, patient attitude that makes a clear

distinction between the person and the person's behaviors. In a conflict with your troubled child, you will want him to always understand that you are rejecting only his negative behaviors, but you are simultaneously still accepting him as your son and a person. You are taking a stand against his behaviors but you still love him as your child and approve of him as a person who can be nice when he wants to be.

As a safeguard to maintaining this distinction between the person and the person's behaviors, you should strive to mentally distance and detach yourself from the impact of the behaviors. Do not take what he is doing personally because he is making these choices for his life, and he will have to answer to the Lord one day for them. Keep your cool in the heat of the battle, not allowing yourself to overreact or to get agitated, angry, distressed, or personally wounded. Respond with a calm interested neutrality which detaches yourself - almost like an innocent bystander. Persevere in this attitude even when the conflict ends in failure or disaster, because you know that the unpleasant outcome is exclusively the result of your child's unacceptable behaviors and choices. Successfully coping with stress and managing conflict means that despite your deep love and concern for him, you do not let your child's actions inflict devastation or trauma upon you personally. Instituting this conflict management strategy of detachment will serve as a protection measure for your psychological well-being and as guidance for self-control.

**CONFRONTATIONS:** When you become involved in a confrontation, be careful not to get sucked into participating in your child's behaviors. "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct..." (2 Tim. 2:23-25). You have seen the many tactics your troubled child employs to avoid discipline. His arguing, ranting, raving, tirades, or fits of rage are designed to gain control of the situation and thereupon squirm out of the consequence. Other tactics employed may be: creating a diversion; twisting the facts; shifting the blame; stalling for time; wearing you down; complaining; griping; antagonizing; or picking a fight or argument. As best as you can with love, exercise your parental authority through the entire disciplinary process, including over the content and manner of his communication. Distancing yourself includes quenching his attempts to draw you into personally engaging in negative conduct like he is.

When emotions are heightened during a heated confrontation, it is usually quite difficult to reason with the enraged person. Giving your child some time to himself to calm down is a good way to diffuse strong emotions and dangerous situations. It is also an opportune time for you to check your attitude and your confrontation approach to ensure that you are exhibiting qualities of Christ-like parenting. This would be an advantageous time to switch off with your spouse and let him/her temporarily take over the confrontation interaction so that you can maintain calmness and return to the interaction refreshed and objective.

When your child has calmed down enough, reason with him as an adult in proportion to his age. This displays honor and respect to him. Being "quick to listen" to his explanation, "slow to speak" or verbally respond, and sincere in trying to look at the situation through his eyes will exhibit respect and reasonability on your part (Jam. 1:19). Troubled youths crave interaction on an adult level and being treated more like an adult, perhaps because they have low self-esteem and even self-loathing. Sending a message that you want to treat him like an adult will generate reciprocal respect.

Be mindful that during heated confrontations, you are modeling conflict resolution skills and problem-solving skills for your troubled child. He is watching your reactions very closely, and over time will tend to adopt your style. Through your example, you will want to eventually wean him from throwing fits during confrontations, and instead develop in him good problem-solving skills and conflict resolution skills of his own.

An effective reasoning technique that works well in some confrontations is to divert the problem back into his court - i.e. have him solve the problem. Through a series of questions, you have the child identify the problem his behaviors have caused, describe what consequences he thinks should be forthcoming from his behaviors, and determine what course of action he thinks he should self-initiate to resolve the problem in a manner characterized by justice and integrity. Thus, rather than dictating a solution and consequence, you are assisting him in logically and realistically thinking through the problem and arriving at a just solution on his own.

Some mental health professionals recommend addressing discipline and rule-making problems in a

family meeting forum. Such an approach tends to neutralize parental authority by spreading the authority among everyone in the family. It also creates fertile conditions for the troubled child to resort to his favorite tactic of intimidation to gain control over the power structure within the family. I see no biblical basis that would allow for this type of democratic family rule, which usurps parental authority when determining discipline. However, family meetings can and should be utilized when a problem or need for a decision arises which affects the whole family and requires their opinion, consent, or participation.

As you get more sensitive and experienced in how to manage conflict effectively, you will find that timing can exert a significant impact upon the ultimate outcome of a confrontation. There is a fine art to picking the best time and place to initiate a confrontation. A general rule suggestion is: fairly soon after the infraction has occurred while the facts are still fresh in everyone's mind, select a time and private environment which would sufficiently enable you to fully deal with the problem in case a strong and prolonged adverse reaction should erupt.

In the brief time between when the infraction surfaced and when you initiate the disciplining process, be sure to investigate adequately to ascertain as many facts as possible. Frequently with troubled youths, an infraction that appears minor on the surface hides an underlying major offense or serious deviant behavior. For example, one time we had one of our group home girls receive an after-school detention for earning too many tardies to classes. At first glance, this appeared to be a typical, relatively minor infraction. But as we investigated further and progressively uncovered more details, we eventually learned that this girl was regularly going outside the school building before school started and during lunch breaks to smoke marijuana, and was thereupon late getting to her next class. In order to hold your troubled youth accountable, you have to catch him at the major stuff he is doing. This requires thorough investigation.

Although you may have ample circumstantial evidence on some occasions, be careful not to incorrectly or falsely accuse your child of doing something he did not do. This will erode respect for you, undermine your parental authority, generate resentment in him, and possibly motivate him to go out and now actually do what you had incorrectly accused him of doing. Troubled youths tend to be very reactionary and compulsive. With minimal forethought and justification, they mechanically react to injustice done to them, regardless of the rationality or of subsequent consequences. Keep your conclusions fair-minded (just and impartial).

When you do have irrefutable facts, hold your ground and follow through with the warranted discipline - regardless of his threats or scathing objections. The common tendency is for parents to revert to prompting, toleration, permissiveness, and leniency in order to avoid or end the confrontation. But, giving in to his intimidation only strengthens your child's resolve to control you. It is for his ultimate good that he be held accountable for his actions.

**POWER STRUGGLES:** For various reasons, many troubled youths develop an affinity for getting into power struggles in order to get their way. As they get older and physically stronger, their ability to successfully carry out power struggles increases. Parents who use 'Tough Love With Accountability' should call the police whenever their troubled teenager inflicts substantial physical harm to others, substantial property damage, or threatening with a weapon. As the authority figure in the home, you have an obligation to protect siblings, a small or fragile spouse, and yourself from an abusive troubled teenager. If your teenager ends up being arrested and going to detention, then that is the choice he made by his actions. Physical abuse must be stopped through appropriate and legal means, or else other people in the future will endure the same abusive treatment from him. A precipitating question to be contemplating is: If this is the kind of physical harm your teenager is doing which you have become aware of, what is he doing to siblings or others that you have not learned about?

**INCARCERATION:** This next assertion may come as a surprise to you, but: spiritually speaking, being arrested and going to juvenile detention or jail for an extended stay is usually the best thing that could happen to a criminally-inclined youth! During the long boring hours of incarceration with nothing to do, a youth has time to think about his life and what he has done. He knows he is guilty and his criminal activity has been exposed. His mind begins to clear, and he can see that what he has done is wrong and deserving of punishment. During a long stay in incarceration, he becomes broken morally. Because of the criminal charges against him, there is uncertainty and apprehension about his future. He is

genuinely afraid of what may come next. Being literally trapped in a cage with no way to free himself, he is powerless and forced to face the stark reality of the consequence for what he has done or been doing. He is destitute and lying face down in the gutter of despair. He is open to changing the direction of his life because he can plainly see that his current direction is heading him down a dead-end street. While in this crisis of being incarcerated, he is more open to spiritual matters than ever before. Indirectly, he begins to realize that he needs a Savior to rescue him from his moral corruption (depravity).

The Lord gets criminally-inclined people's attention when they are in jail. Normally, they are too busy doing their wickedness to have any desire or time to consider God. When they stay locked up in jail for awhile, it is like the Lord has grabbed ahold of them, set them down in a chair, and told them to sit their until they are ready to listen to Him - for their own eternal good. For criminally-inclined youths, this is an effective way the Lord gets their attention.

If parents come along and bail their teenager out of jail, they thwart the Lord's efforts at spiritually reaching the youth. This is going to sound rigid and harsh, but: parents should not bail out their child if he/she is guilty in any way. Supporting the eternal activities of the Lord has paramount priority over the temporal comfort of one's troubled child. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.", "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7, NIV, KJV). This verse is saying not to fool oneself into thinking that one can continue to engage in wickedness without suffering any consequences. God is all-powerful and is actively working to cause people to reap consequences in this life for what they are doing.

Do not be naive about what your child has done or has been doing. If he is guilty, leave your child in detention and allow the Lord time to soften his heart spiritually. But at the same time, use wisdom, caution, and get legal advice. It is a good idea not to be under-informed about the legal consequences your child may reap for his actions. Always keep in mind, though, that for the beneficial purposes of the Lord's long-term plan, He may want your guilty child to be criminally convicted and receive a sentence for his actions (see Gal. 6:7-8 & Matt. 5:29). It is better for your child to suffer discomfort in jail and perhaps in there receive Christ for eternal salvation, than it is for him to enjoy freedom but subsequently "be thrown into eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8;7-9).

**NATURAL CONSEQUENCES:** 'Tough Love With Accountability' permits one's troubled child to reap the natural consequences for his behaviors and actions. Most of us only learn lessons in life if we experience them the hard way - through suffering the natural consequences from trial and error. Our prideful, stubborn, rebellious hearts compel us to ignore wise verbal instruction and instead to try it our way. This is our preferred method of learning.

When my son David was about 2 years old, he always wanted to grab our cat's tail because she walked with it sticking straight up in the air. I repeatedly warned David not to grab the cat's tail because she might claw him. On numerous occasions I interceded just in time to prevent him from making such a grab. Finally one day, when I saw he was going to grab the cat's tail, I let him. Sure enough, the cat whacked at David, hissed, growled, and made it crystal clear to him not to grab her tail. Although he suffered no physical injury, the scare caused him to scream and then cry briefly, but he never grabbed the cat's tail after that.

In the same manner, the Lord allows us to suffer from the choices we make in life because He intends for these experiences to build our character (Jam. 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-4). If He always protected us from the natural consequences of our actions, then we would continue in our own way and not learn nor change for the better. At times, the Lord does intervene to prevent the consequences from going to far. As parents, we should continue to do that protective limiting as well - when warranted. But the older your rebellious child gets, the more he should be allowed to reap what he has sown. Maintaining a balance of what to allow and what to prevent requires wisdom, good judgment, flexibility, and character strength. It is not easy to purposefully stand back, allow suffering to come upon one's child, and then endure the suffering along with the child. But be careful and selective in when and how you interfere with the Lord's teaching and disciplining of your troubled child through the natural consequences of his behaviors (Heb. 12:10).

**FORMULATING CONSEQUENCES:** For those behaviors that do not afford a natural consequence, you will need to formulate a fitting consequence. If you can, try to relate the consequence to the infraction somehow so that while he is serving the consequence, your child is practicing the appropriate behavior that is opposite the infraction behavior. Furthermore, you want him to be thinking about what

he has done wrong during the entire time he is serving the consequence. Fulfilling a related consequence will give the child a sense of making restitution.

Other guidelines for formulating consequences are:

- Consequences should exact a cost in something valued by the child, such as time, privileges, or fun activities.
- Locking a child in a room or withhold food during a mealtime are never appropriate.
- Current consequences should not attempt to rectify or enact punishment for separate past offenses.
- Consequences should not be incremented over time to an extent of becoming overly punishing or harsh.
- Consequences should not be excessive so that they subsequently bury the child, and thereupon must be rescinded later.
- Your child should not derive enjoyment from serving the consequence. For example, some youths like isolation or like to clean.
- Work should be accomplished to provide excessive compensation for damaged or destroyed property (Num. 5:6-7).
- Homework or Bible study work must never be forced as a consequence, but they can be offered as one of several choices of consequences.
- A consequence should not embarrass or humiliate the offender in front of his friends, peers, or siblings unless those persons directly suffered from the offense.
- Spanking is ineffective and counterproductive beyond age 5 or 6. Beating, whipping, or strapping are always abusive and create strongholds of sin in the recipient.
- Keep in mind the child's strongholds, their effects, and their motivations. Interpret, view, and analyze the infraction in terms of his strongholds, and then design the consequence toward weakening and conquering each stronghold.
- Permitting the child to contribute input toward the formulation of a consequence can enhance his maturity - depending on the child's disposition. Ultimately though, you will want to retain your parental authority and make the final decision yourself, which he must abide by.
- Generally, the child's weekly monetary allowance should not be used to fulfill a consequence. An exception to this is when the child is unable or unwilling to make restitution for property damage or loss. Allowances should be tied to building work ethic and to compensate for the successful, timely completion of chores - not to consequence for negative behaviors nor to reward for good behaviors. Lavish or stingy allowances accomplish nothing and are counterproductive to healthy development.

**DELIVERING CONSEQUENCES:** Guidelines for delivering consequences are:

- Bringing up and throwing his past behaviors in his face denotes unforgiveness on your part (1 Cor. 13:5) and will cultivate bitterness in your child.
- Explain the reasons behind the consequences and restrictions he earned. He needs and deserves good reasons and rationales for changing his behaviors.
- As you explain the reasons for his consequence, reiterate and reinforce your previous expectations that he broke. Also, specify that he earned the consequence - you did not give him one.
- Have him complete the consequence right away. He should lose all of his privileges until he has completely served the entire consequence. An exception is if you have designed the consequence to be served for specific periods of time spanned over many days.
- Monitor and lovingly follow through on the consequences. Partially-served consequences teach nothing and instead encourage more negative behavior.
- If the consequence you have formulated is lighter than normal, then clearly explain your reasons for this to siblings so that they understand you are not playing favorites. Because the troubled child has just benefited from a lighter consequence, find ways to reward the siblings over and above normal for their exemplary behaviors. And, offer the same rewards to the troubled child - that in the future he will receive the same rewards whenever he behaves as well as his siblings have.
- Plentifully supply approval, affirmation, and praise when he is appropriately serving his consequence and is doing what is right. During this, highlight the benefits of being good.

**REWARDS:**

- Never reward the child for successfully completing a consequence. He earned the consequence and

thereby has an obligation to successfully complete it.

-- You can force him to comply, or you can entice/reward him to obey. The preferred manner is to entice with rewards. But remember that neither of these methods effect lasting behavior and personality change. To a limited extent, rewards can foster motivations, induce obedience, and buy some love and respect. -- In the long-term, a balance in the usage of rewards will be the most effective. Too many or too high of rewards spoil the child. Too few or too low of rewards produce lost opportunities to reinforce positive behaviors.

**RESERVED TRUST:** When your troubled child has committed a serious infraction, your trust of him should be significantly reduced in all areas relating to that type of infraction. Jesus repeatedly warned His disciples to "be careful" and "be on your guard" against the evil of the Pharisees (Matt. 16:6). They were not to be trusted because they were secretly scheming and practicing evil while appearing to be righteous. Similarly, a troubled youth should not be trusted when he has seriously broken your trust. You need to catch him at the evil he is doing, hold him accountable, and require him to slowly earn back your trust. Then with his evildoing exposed, and being motivated to earn your trust back, he may eventually become repentant and ready for you to counsel him about his underlying strongholds. Your love for him is unconditional, but your trust has to be earned.

One message I repeatedly heard from nearly all of the behavior-disordered group home girls I worked with is that they think their parents are "SO STUPID" because despite the obvious indications, their parents could not tell that they were intimately engaged in evil and gross sin. There are times when parents need to be as clever and "shrewd as snakes", and as harmless and "innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16). You must be on your guard and constantly monitoring the activities of your child - particularly when you are not around. You need to be as fully-informed as possible. Be alert for warning signs and learn to read the indicators of problems.

As a warranted consequence of losing your trust, exercise your right as the parent to do periodic unannounced searches of his room. If he has nothing to hide, any objection will be minimal. In addition to looking for drug paraphernalia and other contraband, watch for gang-related items. Skim his notes and letters to identify any illegal activities and to get an accurate sampling of what he is doing and what he is truly like deep inside. His notes and letters also indicate how he is actually interacting with his peers. Closely observe the flavor of his posters, pictures, and music in his room. These tend to reflect such characteristics as: what he is feeling; what he is thinking about; what his views are; what he desires; who he is; or who he wants to become.

**REDUCED FREEDOM:** A partner to your reserved trust is his reduced freedom. Your child must lose his freedoms to run around unsupervised until he earns back your trust by consistently demonstrating that he can be trusted. Lose of freedoms should always include a strictly-enforced conservative early curfew, because a majority of teenage sinful indulgences occurs late at night under the cover of darkness away from parents. Essentially, you have to restrict his freedom in order to protect him from self-destruction until he is mature enough to be making the right choices for himself. However, as he nears adulthood at 18 years old, you have to taper off most of his restrictions whether he is ready or not. His arrival into adulthood should force you to be continuously modifying your rules and restrictions, with the purpose of maintaining a balance between accommodating his growing needs for independence and autonomy, and your right as parental head of the household to manage the family environment within your home.

When your troubled son or daughter reaches adulthood and moves out, you now loose most of your opportunities to further influence him toward godliness and righteousness. Yes, peace will be restored to your home, but at what cost to your troubled son or daughter? Viewing this from an eternal perspective, it is more preferable to have your troubled adult son remain in your home through the early adult years - assuming he is not violent, substance abusing, committing crimes, or absolutely unbearable. Even though you are paying a price to keep him in your home, you want him to stay under your tutelage in hope that the Lord will effect lasting change in his life through your mentoring efforts.

**RELINQUISHMENT:** On that day when your still-troubled child has moved out (for good, perhaps), your best option is to relinquish him fully over to the Lord to deal with. Like the father in the 'Parable of the Prodigal Son' (Lk. 15:10-32), you watch, wait, pray, and hope - for this is all that you can do now.

Depending on the specific conditions of his leaving, sustain, establish, or stand ready to restore normal relations with him. The more communication you have with him, the more possibility there will be for you to influence him toward Christ. And, by this time in the process of modeling Christ-like parenting, your past exhortations for him to seek the kingdom of God will be recalled in his mind every time he talks with you.

#### Section IV. Christ-like Parenting (cont.)

#### Chapter 10: Reconciling With Your Child

Now after you have been consistently modeling Christ-likeness and implementing balanced discipline for awhile, your relationship with your troubled child should be gradually improving - some. But, his hostile disagreeable attitude towards you still smolders. His opposition and its by-product tension remain entrenched. In a sense, he is still rejecting you - your authority, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Why? Besides having serious behavior problems, part of the reason a child is considered 'troubled' is because his relationship with his parents is dysfunctional. The next logical course of action for you is to dig into the reasons why he is still oppositional toward you, address them, and then resolve this hostility. You must resolve all difficulties and points of contention that still remain between him and you before you can begin to reach him for Christ and thereupon facilitate lasting personality change.

#### **Ministry of Reconciliation**

Hostility and opposition burn deep in the souls of troubled youths because of harmful experiences that have happened to them in the past. Harmful experiences are like barrels of toxic waste buried under our house. They are a part of our life that we do not want to face or think about, so we bury them as deep as we can. Eventually though, the toxic waste eats through our containment efforts and starts oozing toward the surface to pollute and poison our daily thinking and interactions. Ignoring this seepage problem or assuming it will go away does not work. The morally-corrupting aftereffects of our past adverse experiences continue to haunt us throughout the rest of our life despite our best efforts to subdue them.

**CORRECTING PAST INJUSTICES:** Past injustice inflicted by their parent(s) is always a central issue for troubled youths. These injustices can extend from the present all the way back to toddler-hood. Any unfair treatment from a parent can manufacture toxic strongholds of sin in the child. The younger the child is, the more defenselessly vulnerable he is, being unable to protect himself from the injustice and to reason through it. Little children think and view life in concrete terms. Their brains have not yet developed enough to be able to adequately process harmful events in any realistic protective way beyond what their 5 senses (see, hear, touch, taste, smell) are inputting. Consequently, strongholds of sin are readily planted in little children when injustice or abuse is perpetrated upon them - particularly when it is done by a parent who, by natural role, is always unqualifiedly trusted and loved by his/her little child and is suppose to be comprehensively protecting the child.

This may not be a pleasant undertaking for you, but in order to reach your child, you must reconcile with him concerning past injustices you and your spouse(s) have inadvertently or intentionally inflicted upon him. No parent is perfect. He is hung-up in the past even though you are not. His current perspective of the harmful past events are still based upon the original perceptions and thinking for his age when they occurred to him. You may dread opening old wounds, and rightly so. For these old wounds are still very sensitive and tender because they have never healed. To your child, the outrage of the injustices continue to infect and fester his wounds.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus declares that being reconciled to another person is so important that it has priority over worshipping the Lord. Stop what you are doing and "First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" to the Lord (v.24). A positive way to look at this task is that you are engaging in a ministry of reconciliation with your child. (After this is accomplished, your ministry of reconciliation work will then focus on reconciling your child to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:18-19).)

Contemplate and face the truth about what abuse happened to your child in the past. When you finish



reading this chapter, lay *Children of Fire* down and take as much time as necessary to be fully reconciled with him. Do some intense internal soul searching so that you can straightforwardly admit the truth to your child about what you have done and what your spouse(s) or live-in friend(s) has done - no excuses, no vague generalities, and no fudging the truth. Make sincere, open apologies and admissions of guilt on your part. In humility, take full responsibility for your harmful activities, while not casting any of your rightful blame upon your spouse(s) or your child. Furthermore, you should in no way condone or excuse any inappropriate actions your spouse(s) have perpetrated. If you do not come completely clean in your admission of guilt to your troubled child, his strongholds will not only endure perhaps for the rest of his life, but will actually become stronger and more intense. You have the means to end the hostility between you and your troubled child. Go to him as many times as necessary to seek his forgiveness, until he can no longer think of anything he still holds against you. Correct the past wherever you can so that he can move entirely into the present. Make peace with him and come to an understanding with him about your present relationship so that it can now become positive. Take these action steps right now to mend, repair, and heal your dysfunctional, broken relationship with him/her.

Undoubtedly during this time of reconciliation, you will encounter sore spots that you still harbor against him. Whether or not he is confessive, remorseful, and apologetic to you, the Lord commands that you must forgive him from your heart (Matt. 18:35). Similarly, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). "As far as it depends on you", do everything you can to make peace with him (Rom. 12:18), and at least make a one-way termination of hostilities from you. Then from your end of the relationship, you can proceed with genuineness, a cleared conscience, and purity of heart.

It is plausible that given the current situation, reconciliation of your child to your estranged spouse, live-in friend, and/or ex-spouse(s) is not possible or workable. In these scenarios, you can suggest that your child forgive them, but for now he probably will not extend forgiveness to them without authentic face-to-face apologies. If this occurs, then shelve these issues and do not push them. Later if he becomes a believer in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, he should become more open to forgiving, and then you can bring this up again in the proper time (see chapter 12).

Your situation may be exacerbated by an abusive mate who is currently living in the home. A dysfunctional relationship with one parent figure will present a formidable obstacle to the reconciliation efforts of the other parent. If you are not married to this mate, then the obvious biblical course of action is to immediately separate from him/her. Then adultery will be terminated, and you and your child(ren) will no longer be living with him/her and be subject to his/her abuse. If your spouse is being abusive, you can attempt to remedy some of the relationship damage being done by him/her, but care must be exercised to keep from gossiping, disparaging him/her, and negating his/her parental authority. Tactfully admitting to your child that you are unable or unwilling to stop your mate's abusive behavior would be a small yet significant step toward relationship improvement.

**ABUSE:** Besides addressing past injustices, it is equally important to deal with the abuses that have happened to your child. Typically, troubled youths have experienced most of the following abuses in some form and within a wide range of severity. When exploring these with your child, a key concept to remember is that even though such abuses were perpetrated by various persons older and bigger than the child at that time, the child still holds the parents ultimately responsible for not protecting him/her from these abuses.

A parent or adult in the home can inflict:

--**MORAL AND VERBAL ABUSE:** wrongly blaming the child or laying guilt trips on him; breaking promises; demeaning; cussing out; holiday pampering; lack of discipline; poor parenting skills; lack of affection; holding drug parties in the home with the child(ren) present;  
--**PHYSICAL ABUSE:** hitting, striking, or beating him; poverty; homicidal threats and attempts; fighting; an abusive mate; substance abuse; substance abuse during pregnancy; forcing or enticing the child to participate in substance abuse; taking the state welfare monies intended for child support and spending it on substance abuse;  
--**NEGLECT ABUSE:** lack of nurture; abandonment; insufficient necessities to live - food, clothing, housing, bedding; perpetual absence, or neglect by one or both parents; excessive leaving the child at

daycare; insecurity;

--SEXUAL ABUSE: sexual exposure, touching, rape, or enticement by males or females; forcing the child to take extreme protective measures such as running away, hiding, passing out, or vomiting;

--BIOLOGICAL PARENTAL ABUSE (active or passive; past or ongoing): failure or refusal to be the child's parent; abandonment by leaving or giving the child up for adoption; unkept promises; death; permitting or encouraging others to abuse the child; (Note: All foster and adoptive children will have abandonment issues. Even after abandonment, biological parents continued to have a profound negative influence upon their children until the children reach adulthood.)

--REACTION TO ABUSE: anger at God and/or parent(s), adult relative(s), or grandparent(s) for letting it happen and not trying to stop it;

--MARITAL DISCORD AND DIVORCE ABUSE: arguing, fighting, yelling, screaming, or assault between spouses; blaming the child for the marital discord; forcing the child to protect or take care of the mother or siblings; divorce abandonment, insecurity, poverty; loss of love, attention, structure, or identity; other collateral damage.

Divorce is always devastating and traumatizing to minor children. Even for teenagers and young adults, marital discord and/or divorce of their parents is a major crisis. In the children's eyes, divorce equals abandonment by one parent. Divorce always spreads strongholds of sin to every family member who is involved in any way. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), but He blesses the next two generations if the marriage stays peacefully intact (Ps. 103:17-18). Parents should never blame their child(ren) in any way for their failed marriage. Parents should take full responsibility for their part, readily admit failures and poor judgment to the child(ren), and in no way put a guilt trip on them. When reconciling the issue of divorce with a child, address and deal with the full range of the divorce - from the past initial onset of marital arguing and fighting, through the bitter verbal and physical attacks, then the legal bickering and strife, followed by protracted conflicts, and continuing with present lingering bitterness and resentment.

INITIAL DENIAL: Your first attempts to talk with your child about the abuses he has suffered will probably come up against his hardened resistance. In fact, he most likely will outright deny that he is having any problems with his past abuse issues. However, if you closely observe and note any changes in his tone of voice, mannerisms, body language, and agenda, you will see that these subtle behavior changes are revealing his true feelings about the subjects - that he does indeed have major problems from past abuses. These subtle behavior changes also indicate that he is not ready to talk with you about them. Work on earning his trust and reassure him that he will not be disciplined for disclosing his emotionally-charged true feelings about abuses done to him.

CASE STUDY: Loren was a troubled 10 year old girl in our group home who had been adopted at a very young age. During toddler-hood before her adoption, she was abused sexually by her biological parents. Then she was abandoned by them, and eventually adopted by 'Christian' parents. Life with these new parents started out fairly satisfactory, but Loren's behaviors degraded as she grew older. Adding to the downslide, the 'Christian' adoptive father had an anger problem and would cuss Loren out, pull her by the hair, stand on her back with his hard shoe, or lock her in the hot garage all day. He would also wash her during shower time, with his bare hands washing her everywhere. Of course, the adoptive father behaved as an upright 'Christian' gentleman in church and when other adults were around. The adoptive mother did nothing to acknowledge or stop this abuse. Consequently, Loren was prone to fits of rage and striking others. She was torn between fear of another abandonment, and the critical self-protective need to report the abuse being perpetrated by her adoptive father. Thereupon, Loren's relationships with both her adoptive father and adoptive mother were seriously dysfunctional due to the ongoing abuse by the father and the ongoing denial/cover-up by the mother.

Loren's resulting constant disruptive and oppositional behaviors motivated her adoptive parents to place her in a private Christian group home organization, where she ended up in our unit. It took me months of loving attention-giving and accountability before she trusted me enough to start disclosing some of the abuse she endured from her biological parents. Even though numerous indicators pointed to serious issues with her adoptive father and adoptive mother, Loren would not open up about them as readily. One weekend Loren returned from a 3-day homevisit with physical evidence of abuse from her adoptive father. State child protective officials were called in, but Loren changed her story because she

"did not want Daddy to go to prison". Apparently, the adoptive mother also felt this way, because the charges against the adoptive father were investigated but eventually dropped. Loren's behavior problems continued, and shortly thereafter she was abruptly discharged from the private Christian group home organization because during one of her behavior episodes of defiant cussing and yelling, Loren pulled the hair of an adult caregiver. She was then promptly placed in another group home organization. Loren never did open up and disclose any abuse issues to the organization's staff therapist.

Loren's overall negative behaviors abated very little, primarily because she was not reconciled to her adoptive parents. Yet in my conversations with the adoptive parents, amazingly they could not figure out why Loren continued to behave so oppositional-ly to them but was making steady progress in relating well with myself and my wife. Loren's pleas for relief from current abuses and her strong desires to be restored to loving relationships with her adoptive parents went ignored by them. She clung to me for the appropriate parental-type loving relationship she so desperately craved. Moreover, with the Lord's guidance, I detected the presence of abuse issues in her, regarded them seriously, and did everything I could to resolve them and help her process them. In my counseling house parent role, within less than a year I had developed a solid, good, working relationship with Loren that far surpassed that of her adoptive parents.

**YOUR RESPONSE:** Your response to your troubled child's abuse issues must be likewise regarded and reconciled with respect and diligence. You will not make progress in reaching your child until reconciliation has occurred between him and you. Furthermore, if your spouse is being abusive, you must find a way to terminate this in order to make headway with your troubled youth.

After each of your reconciliatory conversations, write down the abuse issues your child mentioned. In later biblical counseling with him (chapter 12), you will want to bring these up again for exploration and praying against. With your troubled child being an unbeliever at this point in time however, he is not ready to deal with these issues on a religious level before the Lord, who is the only One with sufficient power to bring total healing of his psychological wounds.

## **Section V. Facilitating Reconciliation with God**

### **Chapter 11: Gentle Persuasion**

Achieving reconciliation with your troubled child will be a vital major step forward toward your objective of effecting lasting positive personality change in him. After you have made substantial progress in being reconciled with your child, then conditions are ready for you to facilitate reconciliation of your child with God. This is accomplished by preparing and then leading your child to salvation in Christ, followed after that by spiritual nurturing. Your child must genuinely receive Christ as his personal Savior in order to gain access to God's power for change (Jn. 1:12-13). Your job will be to use gentle persuasion as you assist the Lord in helping your child to make this choice.

### **Ministry of Gentle Persuasion**

Bringing a person to salvation is entirely a work of God, but He delights and prefers to include us in helping move the person along to the point where the person makes this decision to receive God's salvation through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross (2 Cor. 6:2). The Lord wants to use every believer in this regard (Matt. 28:18-20).

Your job is to present the message of salvation to your child in a gentle, understandable way (1 Thes. 2:6-8). As a representative of the Lord, you should strive to gently offer and accurately explain to your child how he can place his faith in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation. Through your life, your words, your love, and your parental treatment of him, you are introducing your child to the Lord and living out what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. You are trying to sell him on your faith, its values, and its way of life. Sensitive, patient encouragement and gentle persuasion are to be your presentation style.

Sharing the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ is comparable to planting a garden. First, you

cultivate the soil - softening it and preparing it. Next, at just the right time, you carefully plant the seeds in the proper way. Beneficial fertilizer and water are then carefully added as needed in just the right quantities. Also, safeguards are immediately enacted to thwart potential invaders, such as weeds and dogs, from damaging the seedbed. Finally, all that is left to do is wait, and watch for the Lord to cause the seeds to sprout and grow (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

Pounding the seed into the ground with a hammer does not work. In the same way, pressuring, demanding, forcing, pushing, ridiculing, condemning, blasting, shocking, or falsely representing the message of salvation never work in helping a person move closer to believing in Jesus (2 Tim. 2:25). To the contrary, these approaches turn the person off, harden him to the message, and actually move him farther away from believing.

## **Creating Fertile Conditions**

**HOME:** Perhaps the place that holds the highest potential for being the most fertile and conducive to the successful planting and sprouting of the Good News in a child's heart is the home. Because you are the parent and hold authority over how the home is operated, you have the ability to customize your home's environment to maximize fertile spiritual conditions in it.

In your home and family life, you will want to create an environment and atmosphere that reflect Christ-likeness. Make specific efforts to set apart (sanctify) your home for holy service to the Lord. Purify your home from all unrighteousness. This will involve changing routines, schedules, habits, priorities, opinions, prejudices, expectations, lifestyles, meal gatherings, activities, entertainment, decor, and themes. Conduct a special ceremony with your family to dedicate your home to the Lord's purposes, and in prayer ask Him to bless your home and to cleanse it from everything that is not pleasing to Him.

The atmosphere in your home should also radiate Christ-like love - where love permeates everything occurring in and contained in the home. Promote, feature, and attend to "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" - "anything [that] is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things" (Phil. 4:8). Your "love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Rom. 12:9-10).

A home overflowing with these qualities will become attractive to your troubled youth and his/her friends. Your peaceful, loving, positive home environment will draw them like a magnet, especially if individually their school-life and/or their home-life are not going well. In order to influence your troubled youth toward godliness and impact him for Christ, you want to draw him along with his friends into your home - not chase them out. You should drop out of most of your evening social activities and stay home to raise your child and reach his friends for Christ. (It is potentially disastrous to let troubled children raise themselves.) Encourage your child to invite his friends over to your house, and get to know them. Condition yourself to enjoy their presence and interaction with you. The more contact you have with them, the more opportunities you will have to share the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and to model a better way to live. Besides, you can better monitor what your child is doing with his friends when they are at your house.

**MEDIA & MUSIC:** One area that desperately needs to be changed in your home is the type of media and music that are being consumed. The influence of media and music on children's and teenagers' value systems is enormous. Through the modern media, our children are rapidly becoming exposed to "every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity" (Rom. 1:29). The glitzy, entertaining qualities of media have already hooked and addicted this next generation on smut, immorality, godlessness, moral corruption and filth, wickedness, and impurity.

Garbage in - Garbage out!! If members of your household are watching, listening, and taking into their minds inappropriate, or vulgar, or sexual, or violent content, then these things will eventually plant themselves in their heart and spew out their mouth. "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Lk. 6:45). Minds should be thinking upon only that which the Lord would approve of (Phil. 4:8). A good question to ask when viewing or listening to media is:

Would Jesus approve of this if He were sitting here watching and listening to it with us?

You must practice censorship in your home - diligently - everyday. Because the media is so extensively saturated with every kind of vileness today, you must keep your guard up and monitor all media that is coming into your home - music tapes and CD's, radio stations, video tapes, television, magazines, catalogs, Internet, computer games, and etc. But, expect strong resistance when you start tampering with what media your troubled child is feeding on. The youths of this generation enjoy consuming this kind of media and do not want to give it up.

One effective way to make a smoother transition over to wholesome media (and particularly music) is to conduct an ongoing two-for-one exchange. Make a standing offer: that for each inappropriate tape or CD your child turns over to you for destruction, you will buy him 2 appropriate Christian ones of his choice at the Christian bookstore to replace it. When he does turn in some of his inappropriate tapes or CD's, immediately take him to the Christian bookstore and have him pick out what replacements he wants and likes. Then upon returning home, have the inappropriate media physically destroyed right away so that it is not left sitting around as temptation. Do not merely throw it in the trash where it can be retrieved later. The preferable approach is to have the youth himself safely smash it while everyone else watches.

Another change you will want to make is to gradually switch the background music being played in your home over to contemporary Christian music. Traditional hymn music will outright irritate, provoke, and harden your youth. But, contemporary upbeat Christian music will grow on him/her. So slowly increase this type of music into your home's background music repertoire. Soon you will notice him singing along with these songs and requesting his favorites. Avoid so-called 'Christian Rap' and 'Christian Rock' because it is highly questionable whether these agitated types of music are honoring to the Lord and promote peaceful, wholesome thinking and attitudes. Also, if you have tuned in to Christian radio, shut off any preaching that comes on when your child is present, because your child is not ready for this and frequently the doctrine being espoused is faulty. He can tolerate the Christian music but he will not be able to tolerate the radio preaching in his home. Concede this point of contention to him and remember that you are nevertheless feeding him the same religious message through the lyrics in the contemporary Christian music. Every penny you spend on Christian music that your troubled child likes will be well worth it - one thousand-fold.

**ACTIVITIES:** Family activities should also contain intrinsic Christ-like love and Christ-approved wholesomeness. Find healthy alternative forms of entertainment and activities which your child enjoys and which strengthens relationships. Include his friends, and enjoy having them involved too. Games and recreation sports should not become overly competitive.

**CHURCH:** The church you attend will play a pivotal role in how your troubled child responds to religion. A dull, boring, spiritually-stagnant church with hollow religiousness will quickly turn your child off to religion. A church that teaches false or wacky doctrine is likewise counterproductive (Titus 1:10-11). On the other hand, a vibrant, spiritually alive church that teaches sound doctrine right out of the Bible can do wonders to help draw your child in (Titus 1:9).

Select a church with care. Go and observe. Find out for yourself whether the Bible is actually being taught from the pulpit and in your child's classes and youth group gatherings. Note how the teachers and youth leaders relate to youths in your child's age group. Pay attention to the music. Critique these aspects to determine Christ-likeness. Ask your child whether he liked going to church there, and why or why not. Listen to his feedback and investigate. Pray about it, and keep looking until you find a balanced, Bible-teaching church which is appealing to your child. The right church can and should become a whole new social network for your child, which is appropriate and beneficial to his spiritual and social development. The right church can help to sprout and nurture faith in him/her.

Generally speaking, the behaviors of troubled youths make them unsuitable for attending church peer groups. Most church youth staff are unequipped and un-desirous of managing disruptive behaviors within their church group. Therefore, initially you should accompany your troubled youth in all of his church groups and personally monitor his behaviors until he demonstrates that he is always appropriate in the group and is manageable by the staff. Then, initiate regular periodic communication with his group's staff to ensure that he is not being disruptive. On days when your child is not deserving to go because of bad behaviors, encourage him to go to church anyways (unless he is completely out-of-control) and stay

with him in his group during the entire time. If a problem does arise with your child in a church group, always believe, side with, and explicitly support the staff rather than your troubled child.

**SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:** As has been previously discussed in *Children of Fire*, troubled youths typically keep friends that are a bad influence upon them. Parents cannot pick their child's friends for him. And the older a child gets, the more he needs social relationships. Perhaps a good strategy for managing this undesirable phenomenon is to: 1. be teaching and encouraging your child to say 'No' when his friends suggest doing evil; 2. try to place your child in environments where he can make friends with peers who are appropriate; and 3. bond with the friends that he does have and try to impact them for Christ right along with your child.

## **Daily Devotions**

The pinnacle of all your Christ-like parenting efforts will be the consistent holding of daily devotions with your troubled child. This is the setting in which major progress can occur. Bonding can be accelerated here. Three-way heart-to-heart interaction can transpire between you the parent, the troubled child, and the Lord of the universe. Psychological wounds can be dramatically healed. During devotions time, his personality can be transformed right before your eyes.

If you have never held devotions with your child, then you will have to get him use to the idea. You do not want to force him to participate, but you can and should encourage him to at least sit quietly and listen. Establish a fairly convenient time period in which to generally start and conclude devotions. Shut off all distractions in the home and require everyone to observe the quiet time. Guard this time period and make it into a regular, unbroken family routine. An opportune time of the day is in the evening right before bedtime, because his day is still fresh in his mind, which allows for sins to be remembered better and confessed. Holding devotions before bedtime also helps calm him down, and will send him to bed thinking about the Lord. The peace of mind achieved by getting his life right with the Lord will aid him in sleeping sounder, too. Reflecting on one's day in light of Scriptures tends to re-orient life back into proper perspective. This daily, quiet, reflective thinking towards godliness is the type of habit you want to build in your child.

**WITH AN UNBELIEVER:** Daily devotions should be conducted entirely different with an unbeliever. Every component should be designed toward helping the unbelieving child move closer to placing his faith in Christ. Use an accurate translation of the Bible that is easy and appealing for him to read and understand, like the New International Version (NIV). Avoid using devotionals, and instead select and study main Bible passages from the 4 Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - so that he is introduced to Christ and learns details about Him in a picturesque, storytelling way. Strive to make the stories memorable and interest-holding, because dull and boring doctrinal lecturing will turn him cold. Always be sure your doctrine is biblically sound because those who teach will be held more accountable, and the Word loses its effectiveness when watered down or distorted (Jam. 3:1; 1 Tim. 4:16; Titus 2:1). Ask plenty of thought-provoking questions that are challenging and engaging, but not too difficult for his level of comprehension. The objective is to have your child realize for himself that he is heading down the path to eternal punishment, and he therefore needs to change directions and call upon the Savior to rescue him from the impending, just consequences of his sins (Matt. 7:13-14; Rom. 10:13).

Make it the highest priority to offer and hold devotions every day. Plan ahead and revise your schedule if some upcoming event is going to interfere with devotions time. Regularity of devotions will establish a routine for both you and your child, and will cultivate a bonding time. A concept you want to convey to your child is that believers should be steadfastly committed to communing with the Lord every day - whether they feel like it or not, and whether it is convenient or not.

Do not expect immediate reverence for the Lord and His Word from your unbelieving child. Instead, expect initial callousness, disinterest, unconcern, apathy, or even outright disrespect, blatant disdain, and open hostility. Spiritual blindness and confusion will be the norm, for "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

**PRAYER:** It is always improper to insist or ask an unbeliever to pray. In their state of unbelief,

unbelievers are by nature enemies with God and at war with Him (Rom. 5:10). Furthermore, the Lord detests and will not hear the prayers of the wicked (Prov. 15:29,8). Never force your child, or anyone else for that matter, to pray. Prayer should always be offered voluntary and not submitted under compulsion (2 Cor. 9:7). Instead, you set the example by praying out loud in group settings. Formulate your prayers so they reflect your love for the Lord Jesus and so that they reiterate the gospel message. Make your verbal prayers personal and from the heart so that your personal intimate relationship with the Lord is evident. Let your unbelieving child see and hear your real relationship with the real Lord.

**SALVATION:** After your child has heard and understands the gospel message of salvation, then you can and should occasionally suggest and gently invite him to place his faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Discernment is needed here to determine if his heart has been softened enough by the Lord so that he is ready to believe in Jesus as his Savior. Base all of your assertions for salvation on specific Bible verses, which you will read, teach, and review with him right out of the Bible. Keep your language simple and avoid using big, technical words. Re-read chapter 3 in *Children of Fire* to refresh your memory on the basic theological principles comprising salvation.

In order to receive salvation, your child must first acknowledge that he has sinned. Read and explain a sin verse like Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". Before he can get saved, a person has to realize that he is not going to heaven because of his sin. And, he cannot get saved if he refuses to admit that he has sinned. Many young children get hung up on this, so come right out and ask your child if he has ever sinned or done something naughty. If he is in denial, you can offer generalized examples of common sins a child his age would do and read the corresponding commandments out of the Ten commandments in Exodus 20:1-17. If he remains in denial, then you cannot and should not proceed any further into the process of leading him to salvation in Christ until he is ready to freely admit that he is a sinner.

Next, review with your child that he must believe that Jesus died on the cross to give His perfect, sinless life and blood in payment for the penalty for his sins. In previous devotions, you should have been reading and teaching him the death, burial, and resurrection accounts as recorded in later parts of the Gospel books Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Review with him one of these passages you studied together. Be careful to not be doing all the talking here, but listen carefully to what your child has to say about what he remembers, understands, and believes. Discern if he actually understands and believes what he is saying, or is merely repeating what he knows you want him to say. Ask clarifying questions to test his understanding. You can use realistic drama to help him visualize biblical concepts and accounts.

To get saved, an unbeliever must also believe that Jesus bodily rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:2-8). Again, review as necessary the biblical account(s) you studied together. The purpose of this meticulous step-by-step reviewing is to surface and address any problems that might prevent salvation from actually occurring. Some pre-teens and older youths will come up with a theory or belief about the resurrection that creates an impasse to salvation, such as the incorrect notion that "Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but only passed out". Let your child talk and listen to what he has to say. Then lovingly show him in the Scriptures what the Lord says happened. Allow your child his rightful freedom and time to decide and believe for himself. Permit and encourage him to examine and question biblical doctrines, so that he can personally take ownership of them for himself. Radically changing his beliefs and value system will take time and sufficient motivation.

The next step for an unbeliever is repentance - to turn from his sins, and turn toward living for the Lord in godliness (Acts 2:38). Many older teens and most adults get stuck at this point because they do not want to give up their sinful indulgences. However, some of them will listen to reasoning about the long-term futility and unsatisfactoriness of indulging in temporarily pleasurable sinfulness (Prov. 14:12; 12:15).

With these several biblical doctrines correctly in place in the unbeliever's mind, the final step for him is to take a step of faith and commit his life to believing in Jesus. Merely knowing these doctrines and biblical accounts is not enough to receive salvation. The unbeliever must firmly commit himself to believe in this for himself at some specific point in time. And this commitment takes a sizeable step of faith that is based upon God's Word.

Taking this step of faith is like a person going to an airport to fly to Hawaii. He arrives at the airport,

finds the right terminal, has his boarding ticket in his hand, and is ready to go. The jet airplane pulls up to the terminal, its door opens, an announcement is made that the flight is going to Hawaii, and prospective passengers are invited to board the plane. The person carefully inspects and approves the tires, the engines, the fuel tanks, and the wings. From his observations, the person knows that plane is fit to fly to Hawaii. But as the last call to board the plane is announced, he remains standing in the terminal looking out the window at the plane leaving the terminal. He refuses to get on the plane because deep down inside he does not truly believe that the plane will get him there safely. Even though he has plenty of knowledge about the flight, he nevertheless declines to take the step of faith to actually board the plane and thereby trust that the plane will get him to his destination safely.

After acquiring a thorough knowledge about how to get saved, your child may respond by hesitating at the point of taking a step of faith. He may stay at this point for years - or even the rest of his life. Your job is to help him get to this point of decision, but you cannot make the decision for him nor can you pressure him to make it. So you patiently wait, persevere in intercessory pray, and keep reinforcing the basic doctrines for salvation as you teach him from the Bible during daily devotions.

When the time comes in which he indicates that he wants to believe in Jesus now, then you again briefly review these basic doctrines of salvation, being sure to read and derive them from applicable Bible verses. If he is in full agreement with these doctrines and is ready to take the step of faith, a good way for him to cement this step is to pray and tell the Lord what it is he wants. If he so desires, you can assist him in formulating the prayer by saying the words, short phrase-by-phrase, and having him repeat them to the Lord. Be sure though that he understands that he needs to talk to the Lord - not to you, because you cannot save anyone. He also needs to understand and be completely honest about what he tells the Lord, or else the prayer will mean and accomplish nothing.

Before dictating the words to the prayer, give a brief summary of what you are going to say so that he understands what he is praying. An easy and highly effective way to quickly generate a prayer for salvation is to string along 2 of the key verses you used in teaching the gospel message. One of them should pertain to being a sinner, and the other should be a condition/promise verse: that if a person believes/then he will be saved. The following is a sample prayer for salvation that can be used with young children and anyone older. It has been taken from Romans 3:23 and John 3:16 and has been chopped into short phrases with slash marks / .

*Dear Lord,  
I know that I have sinned / and been naughty, / and that I cannot get into heaven on my own / because of my sins. / Please forgive me. / I believe that You love me / and sent Your Son, Jesus, / to die on the cross / for my sins. / I believe that Jesus / was raised from the dead. / I want to turn from my sins right now / and believe in Jesus / to take me to heaven / one day when I die. / Thank you. / In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Another sample prayer for older children, teenagers, or adults is listed near the end of chapter 3 in *Children of Fire*. For younger children, you may want to abbreviate that sample prayer some and use simpler words.

During the middle of the prayer, take a peak at how your child is praying - whether his eyes are closed and he looks sincere, or whether he is looking around and playing with something while repeating your words. This will give you a good probable indication of his readiness to get saved, the genuineness of his prayer, and whether he faked the prayer or not. I have found that due to their extensively deceptive dispositions, almost all troubled youths do fake the salvation prayer on the first time, and/or they falsely claim that they have genuinely done this already. Faking a prayer for salvation or mindlessly repeating the prayer absolutely does not achieve a person salvation.

Because no human has the power to see the true intentions inside another person's heart, you must be very, very careful what proclamations you make after your child exhibits an apparently authentic prayer for salvation. Even if tears are streaming down his face during a salvation prayer, do not assume that he just got saved - nor should you assume that he did not get saved. You cannot say for sure because you do not know for sure. And you do not want to give him a false sense of salvation, or conversely, doubt about his salvation. Therefore, never make direct, unqualified, declarative, pronouncing-type judgment



comments like, "You are now saved and going to heaven one day". Rather, reserve your estimation of what actually happened, and instead always make all of your post-salvation prayer comments conditional, like "If you believe in Jesus, the Bible in John 3:16 says that you are now saved and going to heaven one day". Place the responsibility for what really happened during this apparent prayer for salvation upon your child and the Lord.

Knowing whether you should continue doing evangelism of helping him believe in Jesus, or if you should switch to discipleship of helping him grow in his new faith is quite difficult to definitively ascertain at this point. He could be faking it, or his salvation could be real - initially there is just no way to tell for sure. So, the best course of action is to continue teaching the basic biblical doctrines and passages for salvation and listen closely to his responses and comments, noting any changes in terminology but being careful not to feed him the responses and terminology you want to now hear from him. During the next days, ask follow-up questions which are carefully constructed to incite descriptions, rather than a mere 'yes' or 'no', and do not feed him the answer within the question. An example of a very poorly framed question is: "Did you get saved?". This question tells you nothing about what the child believes, indicates the answer you are looking for, and furthermore most youths will falsely answer 'yes' to this just to avoid the question. The proper way to ask this is something like: "If you were to die today, do you think you would get into heaven...why (or why not)?" This question requires a descriptive answer and does not hint at what answer you are looking for. Any answer short of the correct response "Yes, because I believe in Jesus who paid the price for my sins on the cross so that I can go to heaven" indicates that your child most likely is not saved.

Another critical indicator which will give evidence to his salvation or not is that the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22-23 (i.e. "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control") will now start to be exhibited in a new, fresh way in his life. You should notice some distinct positive changes in his attitudes, behaviors, and personality.

With a troubled youth who has gotten saved, you should also now see and hear a new internal battle going on within him. A new repentant part of him now wants to do right and is actively opposing his old propensities to habitually engage in sinfulness whenever he wishes. Because his old strongholds are still present and fully functioning, the recently saved trouble youth will exhibit wide mood and behavior swings in which he is flip-flopping back and forth between these opposite natures.

Virtually no evidence of the fruits of the Spirit clearly determines that the Spirit of God is not present in his life, and therefore salvation has not occurred yet. Until you see measurable evidence of the fruit of the Spirit and genuine repentance, treat him as an unbeliever and keep reiterating the gospel message and offering occasional invitations to receive Christ as Savior.

**DISCIPLESHIP:** When you have observed convincing evidence that salvation has occurred in his life, then you want to gradually start introducing other biblical doctrines during devotions while simultaneously reviewing the doctrine of salvation. The purpose here is to help him become established in the reality of his salvation while also starting to become grounded in the basics of the faith. Your ministry goal now is to focus on making him into a fruit-bearing disciple of Jesus (Matt. 28:19).

As his interest in spiritual matters grows, excel at teaching God's Word in an interesting, appealing, thought-provoking, and Spirit-empowered way. Be sensitive not to run your devotions time too long, always staying within the range of 30 minutes minimum and 45 minutes maximum. Make one main biblical point that has been taken directly from a verse you are studying during the devotion time, and expound on that point without getting sidetracked. Address unrelated topics and questions after devotions time is over. The power to change your troubled child is contained within God's words - not your words. Feed him the Word of God first (2 Tim. 4:2; Matt. 4:4).

For the devotions time the next day, re-read the previous few verses, briefly review the one main point made the day before, and tie it in with the one main point you are going to develop next. Strive to keep your teaching clear in order that the Lord may open his mind so that he can understand the Scriptures (Col. 4:3-5; Lk. 24:45). Be doubly sure to apply the main point to his life. If he does not see how it applies to him, he will not be convicted by God's Spirit nor be motivated to change. Work with the Lord to "fill" your child "with the knowledge of [God's] will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9).

Consistently holding daily devotions with him will help him maintain and perhaps grow in the faith. As you get immersed in and comfortable with devotions time, you will be tempted to rebuke your troubled child from God's Word. Due to his many areas of sinfulness, conceivably you could rebuke him nearly every day from whatever Bible passage you are in. Put yourself in his shoes, though, for a moment. Would you like if you were personally rebuked by your adult Sunday School teacher every time you attended his class? Teach, correct, rebuke, admonish, and encourage from the Word with great patience, kindness, and careful, gentle instruction (Col. 3:16; 2 Tim 4:2; 2:24-25). "Encourage, comfort, and urge him to live a life worthy of God" (1 Thes. 2:12).

Teaching and applying the Word of God should not be restricted to within devotions time only. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, instructions are given to parents about how to present God's Word in the home:

4. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

In your ordinary daily interactions, teachable moments will arise when your child will be receptive to the on-the-spot application of biblical principles you taught during previous devotions times (v.7). "Make the most of every opportunity" to "impress" and implant God's Word in your child's heart (Col. 4:5; Deut. 6:7). In your conversations at meal times and after school, talk about how biblical principles apply to the given situations (Col. 4:6; Deut. 6:7). Visibly demonstrate in real-life problems, crises, or circumstances why and how to put God's Word into action. Moreover, put reminders around the house (Deut. 6:8-9). Christian bookstores have nice posters and decorations which tastefully yet poignantly apply biblical principles to everyday life situations. Have your child help you select some of these to put up around the house. Also, encourage him to pick out some of these posters that he would like to put up in his bedroom, and then buy them for him. If you can get him to use them as replacements for his inappropriate or worldly posters, that is even better.

## Section V. Facilitating Reconciliation with God (cont.)

### Chapter 12: Biblical Counseling

When your comprehensive parental ministry efforts are successful in gently persuading your child to believe in and live for Christ, the foundation is in place upon which lasting personality change can now begin to be established. By its intrinsic nature, discipling will precipitate some changes in his life. However, due to their vested power, the deeply entrenched strongholds of sin will not voluntarily succumb to generalized discipling. The Word of God must be applied directly and specifically to each stronghold in order to subdue them. This direct application of biblical principles and truth to individual strongholds is accomplished in discipling through one-on-one biblical counseling.

### **Ministry of Biblical Counseling**

SOURCE: Life-changing counseling comes from the Lord, as He declares in Proverbs 8:14, "Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power". Counseling which draws upon the advice, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of the Lord will be fortified with His life-changing power. By default then, humanistic counseling is essentially devoid of God's life-changing power. Countless hours of secular advice-giving and lecturing your child bear testimony to this reality that God's power is absent in humanistic counseling. Hence, to effect lasting change in your child, your counseling approach must be substantially altered so that you are relying upon "God's power" rather than upon "men's wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:5).

**WIELDING:** Battling and defeating strongholds of sin require taking up and wielding "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). Through the hearing of His Word, the Lord instructs, teaches, directs, and counsels us in the way we should think, believe, and live (Ps. 32:8). Your counseling of your child must incorporate the activity of wielding God's Word to confront and assault strongholds of sin (Prov. 8:13-14).

**COOPERATION:** As an extension of the ministry of gentle persuasion, your counseling should likewise be characterized by sensitive encouragement and patient instruction (2 Tim. 2:24-26). The whole counsel of God should be offered in a cooperative manner - not with any form of coercion. Your approach should be to kindly, tenderly, and lovingly come along side him to assist in his spiritual walk and growth. Progress cannot be made unless you have a good working relationship with your child.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** The strengthening of your relationship will allow you to gradually and gently confront your child about his behaviors and help him realize that he is accountable before the Lord. Children need to be compassionately reminded daily about God's authority over them and their future accountability to Him (Deut. 6:5-9). Biblical counseling during daily devotions is an excellent venue for fostering accountability before the Lord, as well as for formulating biblical solutions and initiating behavior change.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Proper counseling should also carefully observe confidentiality. Trust will be built if you appropriately keep the issues and experiences of your child confidential. Biblical counseling does not seek punishment nor force admissions of guilt, but instead offers help in working through problems, remedying hurts, disarming issues, and healing abuse. Disclosing his personal information to others will effectively quench any motivations for your child to tell you anything.

**IDENTIFYING STRONGHOLDS AND THEIR ROOT CAUSES:** In order to be able to battle strongholds of sin, it is necessary to identify them so that you can determine their root cause and then select a corresponding Scripture passage(s) to apply to the defective thinking or beliefs. Appendix B and a concordance may be very helpful in finding relating Bible verses. To be thorough in your counseling, efforts must be exerted to identify even the subtle or covert strongholds. The following is a list of ways you can utilize to identify strongholds.

Look for, explore, examine, and/or investigate any thinking, behavior, or personality trait that is:

- dysfunctional, such as: social; relational; behavioral; emotional; psychological; academic; spiritual; or sexual;
- a pattern of sin, sinful involvement, or sinful indulgence;
- a habit or repeated instinctive reaction;
- unbalanced, defective, or unrealistic thinking or self-perception;
- un-biblical or anti-biblical beliefs or values;
- a lingering mental hurt, pain, anguish, stress, or distress;
- oppositional to peacefulness, righteousness, godliness, or faithfulness (Jn. 14:27);
- un-biblically self-protecting or self-promoting;
- idolatrous;
- tormenting, harassing, or weakening;
- unforgiving;
- deceptive, abusive, harmful, destructive, or negative.

Other resources that can be utilized for identifying strongholds are the lists you have accumulated so far:

- personal issues (Chapter 3);
- inherited strongholds (Chapter 6);
- abuse issues (Chapter 10);
- strongholds of sin (Appendix A);
- (derive a list from your child's) family history and negative life experiences.

**GENERAL POINTERS:** The following is a compilation of additional general pointers for effectively treating strongholds through biblical counseling:

- Re-read Chapter 6 and use the general steps of treatment as described therein.
- I have found that God is always willing to psychologically heal a person as quickly as the person is willing to regard and combat his strongholds in God's way. However, this does not necessarily hold true for purely medical problems. Nevertheless, the Lord is honored when we ask Him to remove or heal a real or an apparent medical condition, but the prayer must be offered without doubt (Jam. 5:14-16; 4:2-3; 1:6).
- Making an assumption that a medical problem is due solely to biological conditions can be incorrect. One indication that should prompt you to strongly suspect that a medical problem has a spiritual cause is if the symptoms are not consistently displayed.
- Normally, you will start counseling to get the easiest strongholds removed first, then working your way to the hardest. The person's trust and confidence in you will thereby build, resulting in him becoming more receptive and repentant as he makes progress. In cases involving perpetration or substance addiction, initial counseling should include biblical exhortation to immediately cease such activities.
- A major roadblock that will effectively stall all progress in biblical counseling is any grievances or issues the person has with God. These must be addressed and cleared first before any headway can be accomplished on other issues.
- When trying to dig out a stronghold, it is imperative that you get at all of the tentacles in order to gain victory over the stronghold. Let's consider as an example 'excessive burping'. Just treating excessive burping in general will not get rid of the stronghold. You have to dig out all of its supporting tentacles, such as burping because: 'I want to'; 'I have to'; 'it makes me feel good'; 'it gets me attention'; 'it makes my friends laugh'; or 'I like being obnoxious'. As the person becomes ready and willing, you must keep digging out every single root cause in order to attain comprehensive victory.
- Be on guard not to get stuck in the quicksand of trying to deal exclusively with the symptoms. Get past what is going on externally to get a true picture of what is occurring internally. Move to dealing with the root cause(s).
- In the biblical counseling process, negative feelings can be both a starting point and an ending point. You can start with the feelings and use them to point to their root cause(s). Then as you work on biblically resolving the root cause, you check the feelings for peacefulness to ascertain if the root cause has been completely resolved or not. But, you must get past the feelings in order to uncover and address the root cause, which is spawning the feelings. Otherwise, you are merely treating the symptoms and not the wound itself. To walk by faith means to do what is right whether a person feels like it or not. Good feelings will follow when there is obedience to godly living. Despite the flood of contrary feelings, the person must walk in obedience and trust the Lord to work things out (Rom. 8:28).
- Making assumptions about what your child means, believes, or is thinking can be counterproductive. It is better to let the child describe what he means. Listen carefully and take notes of other possible strongholds to investigate. Be a student of his attitudes and thinking processes. Understand your child and the effects that his experiences have had on him.
- Be careful not to be fooled by masterfully executed avoidance strategies, diversion tactics, charades, bogus-ness, vehement denial, clever deception, hidden critical details, falsified facts, and etc. Expect that the battle will intensify as you get closer to the root causes.
- During biblical counseling, when your child gives you an answer that is deliberately false, a frequently helpful tactic is to then ask him if the Lord Jesus agrees with his answer.
- Remember that if you meet strong resistance, then he is not yet ready to repent of that stronghold. Keep feeding him the Word of God and wait patiently for the Lord to change your child's mind. Stay committed to offering him biblical counseling.
- If your child is unrepentant in any area, regularly remind him of the long-term consequences of his actions and how it will play out in the long run.
- Keep in mind that your troubled child may not want to divulge to you, his parent, some of the things he has been doing which were criminal, shameful, or would anger you. Do not insist that he disclose them to you, but rather encourage him to talk silently in prayer with God about them. Then continue in your counseling and probe for sub-strongholds. Remember, your objective is to facilitate his relationship with

the Lord to bring lasting personality change. You do not want to inject a stumbling block in that process by demanding to know details that you are entitled (or not) to know. Your youth may tell you one day - if he has a good reason to and when he feels it is safe to do so.

-- When troubled youths say they cannot control themselves from indulging in a sin, they may be mostly right. Their control is sporadic and inconsistent at best because the stronghold has established overpowering control over them and is effectively hindering them from submitting to God and bearing fruit for Him (Rom. 6:5-7).

-- The Lord Jesus gives permission for believers to ask for a binding of strongholds in Matthew 18:18, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven". I have found that bindings of strongholds can be quite useful and particularly effective for a brief time - when they are asked in an audible prayer for and with a believing person who is currently exhibiting an out-of-control stronghold. It is important to make the distinction after requesting a binding, though, that the Lord has indeed briefly bound the stronghold, but the person himself may be choosing by his own free will now to indulge in the stronghold anyways for whatever reason(s). In other words, for a brief time immediately following the binding, if the person is still engaging in the sin, the intensity and power emanating from the stronghold have been bound by the Lord and thereby noticeably reduced. The Lord has temporarily provided the person with the ability to have sufficient control over himself while the stronghold is bound.

-- During biblical counseling, you can likewise ask the Lord to clear your child's mind.

-- When uncertain about what to do next in counseling, pray and ask the Lord for guidance.

-- The person you are trying to help may at times resort to verbally attacking or accusing you. Even though he may try to toss you in the fiery furnace, you must be willing to take the heat and stick with him through the fierce combat with his strongholds. If you have built a good relationship with the person, he will eventually come back for more help. He is just acting out of the latest stronghold you are encountering next. You can consider this attacking behavior as an indication that you are getting closer to a very nasty and ferocious stronghold.

-- Unforgiveness is usually the primary stronghold when dealing with abuse.

-- Persevere in working on an abuse issue until godly peace is completely achieved for it. You can determine if complete peace has been achieved by asking the person how does he feel when he now thinks about the abuse situation.

-- The lingering aftereffects of past abuse can manifest as dysfunction in many different areas or ways: school behaviors; homework; sports; peer relationships; sibling fighting; substance abuse; aggression; rebellion; running away; introversion; sexual promiscuity or perversion; gang involvement; anger or rage; moodiness; depression; or suicidal.

-- Crisis situations require that you first stabilize the disequilibrium of the crisis before you can move to dealing with its source or with lesser strongholds. Stabilize the crisis and deal exclusively with the immediate precipitating factors first. Then when he is receptive to your counsel, you can work on getting to the root cause(s).

-- If you stay observant, you can spot when a severely abused person is having a flashback. Don't panic if she freaks out. Stay calm and ask the person if she is having a flashback. Then ask her to describe it. Remind her that the Lord is ready to heal her of the pain - if she is willing to forgive the abuser and let go of the anger. If she flips into a baby-ish demeanor while talking about traumatic abuse, then she may very well have developed a fundamental personality defect from the severe abuse. (Counseling a fundamental personality defect requires some modifications in the counseling approach in order to accommodate the dynamics going on and to facilitate the Lord's repairing of the defect.) Do not discourage her from talking in this baby-ish demeanor, but rather view it as a good indication that very traumatic abuse has occurred to her during early childhood. When the Lord has completely healed her of the adverse effects of the abuse, her baby-ish demeanor will leave as well.

-- At times you may need the help of a professional biblical or pastoral counselor. Referring to a secular psychiatrist, psychologist, or therapist is inadvisable because these persons hold views and give advice that frequently are opposite of Scriptures.

-- In a troubled youth, when you have successfully finished dealing with one area of bondage, then

another stronghold usually pops up right away. Do not be discouraged or grow weary and give up (Gal. 6:9). Persevere in your battle, because there are only a fixed number of strongholds in the person's life even though it may seem at the time that there is an endless supply. God is delighted when we persevere and are steadfast in the battle to be free from strongholds of sin (Eph. 6:10-18). Moreover, in the battle both you and your child are learning how to gain victory over spiritual problems. Proceed with confidence because you know that God is pleased with your parental ministry and biblical counseling endeavors, and He is using you to accomplish His will in your child's life (Rom. 12:2).

I have found that in counseling extremely troubled youths who are receptive and cooperative to the biblical counseling, in one year of counseling of at least 4 sessions per week, she will get rid of a majority of her strongholds - resulting in some immediate easily-measurable major personality changes. As the number of remaining strongholds tapers off, then they pop up less frequently and you start to run out of strongholds to work on until life circumstances trigger another one to surface.

-- Due to spiritual immaturity, expect that your child's obedience and submission to God will be negligible at first. Initially, he will be a very poor witness for Christ because of his bondages and double-mindedness (Jam. 1:5-8). Help him to develop obedience and submission to God. Progress will likely be slow and hard-fought.

-- Regularly encourage your child by reminding him of the progress that has been made so far and the deliverance God has granted him.

-- Within your biblical counseling, prepare your child over time to be able to resist the temptations and hazards of life. Explore options with him about how he can better handle difficult situations next time in a godly manner. Empower him to biblically counsel himself.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I hope the material in this book has been helpful to you and your troubled child. After you have been ministering to your child for awhile, you may want to go back and re-read *Children of Fire* again so that you can institute aspects that you may have forgotten or did not comprehend fully the first time you read it.

I am available to provide you the reader with personalized advice or with biblical counseling. If after having read this book you are in need of further assistance from me, I can be reached through my E-mail address:

In closing, I would like to offer the following prayer:

*Dear Lord,*

*We know that the salvation of the righteous comes from You. Indeed, You are our stronghold in time of trouble. You help us and deliver us (Ps. 37:39-40). Apart from You we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). But with You, we can do all things because You give us strength (Phil. 4:13). Lord, grant this reader Your strength, wisdom, discernment, patience, perseverance, love, kindness, and understanding so that he/she can effectively minister, teach, counsel, and parent through Your Word. Also, please grant to this reader's child repentance leading him/her to a knowledge of the truth so that by Your power he/she will come to his/her senses and escape from the trap, which has spiritually enslaved him/her (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Lord, pour out your power and blessing upon this family. Transform this child of fire into a child of light. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Blessings,

Dr. Mel W. Coddington  
www.BelieverAssist.com

## Appendix A: List of Strongholds

The following is a list of strongholds that I encountered mostly within group home teenage girls. I have been able to identify and confirm each item in this list as a spiritual stronghold through the successful and complete removal of each by means of utilizing a specific type of biblical counseling. From observations, these items are things that a person either: engages in; loves to do; has a strong desire to do; is experiencing; is doing in excess; is doing frequently; is obsessed with; is being controlled by; or has a compulsion to do.

Even though the nature of these strongholds includes psychological problems and/or medical problems, my counseling approach revealed and verified that all of these strongholds on this list had a spiritual component, which was in addition to their respective psychological and/or medical component(s). Furthermore, all of these strongholds on this list were in some manner directly linked to a source of sin, specifically either being conducted in a sinful manner, and/or stemming from past experienced abuse, and/or stemming from past sinful behavior. And the presence, power, and intensity of these spiritual strongholds with their corresponding sin source remained intact, unaffected, and unremoved by any of the treatment approaches that were used on the group home teenage girls by the modern group home treatment approaches, the modern secular therapy, the modern psychiatry, and the modern psychotropic medications.

Of course, it would be improper to assert that all of the items on this list always have a spiritual component to them and/or a link to sin, but nevertheless this document is a report of my findings for these behavior-disordered teenage girls in a state-of-the-art treatment group home setting. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, because when I got this far, I stopped recording more items upon realizing from this data that any sin can become a stronghold. But, the more troubled a person is, the more of these strongholds he/she may have, and may have more that are not listed herein.

This list can be very helpful as a checklist for identifying strongholds in a person's life. This list can also give direction as to where effective treatment and cure can be found, of which modern psychology and modern medicine are unable to facilitate a cure. The cured medical problems have been underlined so that they are easy to find in this list.

A - abandonment; abortion; not accept authority of adults; accusing; agitation; alcoholism; anger; annoy; antagonize; argue; arrogance; asthma; attention (need, demand)

B - babble; biting (fingernails, arms, tongue, people); bitterness; bizarre; mental block-out; "blood"; boasting; boredom; bossy; burping

C - candy; cerebral palsy; resistance to change; childishness or act like a baby; clumsy; co-dependence; complain; confusion; contempt; control others; coveting; critical; cruel; crying; cussing

D - dancing (around, inappropriate); deception; delusion; denial; depression; despair; destroy property; devious; discouragement; disgusting; dishonest; disorganized; disrespect; dissension; dissociation; distracted; "do as I please"; doing things wrong; doodling; don't care; doubt; dullness; not drink enough liquids; drugs (legal, illegal); dyslexia (mixed up or backwards writing or reading)

E - eating (cravings; nothing; too much; objects; false hunger; addicted to a particular food, soda pop, or snacks; planning to overeat; becoming hungry by just thinking about food; eat to escape unpleasantness or stress; eat to relieve boredom); evasiveness; exaggerate; excitement; indecent exposure; eye problems (cross-eyed; divergent or split-eyed; tunnel vision; blurred vision; pink eye)

F - going to fail; fainting; faking it; fantasizing; farting; fear; fear of future; fidget (restlessness); fighting; start fires; flaky; flashbacks; flick off; foggy or clouded thinking; foolishness; freeze up (unable to move or speak); frustration; acting funny

G - gang activities; not get along with others; "not get my way"; giddy; God (false, 'Elohim', "I am God"); giggles; goof around; goofy; gossip; greed; abnormal yellowish lump (cancer growth) under the skin; grouchy; guilt

H - goofy hairdo; hallucinations; harshness; hate (church, Jesus, God, children, everything, life, everyone, teachers, school, police, vacations); headache; hiccups; hide; hitting; false Holy Spirit; hopelessness; hurt other people; hyper; hypochondriac

I - idolatry; false illness; impatience; inflexible; insensitive; insulting; insecurity; the itches; interrupting; intimidation; irresponsibility; isolation

J - jealousy; false Jesus; judgmental

K - kidnapping; throw knives

L - laughing; laziness or do nothing; "nobody likes me"; limit-testing; not listen; losing things; lusts; lying

M - magic; malice; manipulate; marijuana; masquerade; masturbation; materialism; memory loss; messy; not mind my own business; mind-link; miss the point; mocking; modeling; mumble; murder

N - neglect; nightmares

O - obnoxious; odor (body, breath); overreact

P - pain (physical, mental, blocker); paralysis; pass out; pneumonia (lethal); pride; overly protective

Q - "I am the Queen"

R - racism; rage; rape; rebellion; reject; not responsible; restless; retarded; revenge; ridicule (self, other people); rocking back and forth; rudeness; run away

S - sadness; sarcastic; scheming; skip school; screaming; seclusion; seduction; selfishness; self-mutilation; false self-perception; self-pity; sensuality; sexism; sexual (desires, activities, promiscuity, perversion, prostitution, homosexuality); shakes; want new shoes; shy; silly; not sit still; slamming doors; slander; sleepiness; sleeplessness; acting smart; smoking; snotty; sorcery; spaciness; speech problems (speechless or mute, talk endlessly, pronunciation problems, speech mix up); steal; like stink; stomachache; strife; stubborn; playing stupid; sucking (thumb, fingers, tongue); suicide; superiority; suspicion

T - talk endlessly; threatening; throw things; ticked off; want to try everything

U - unfair; unforgiveness; too frequent urination; "this is useless"

V - vanity (in appearance, in accomplishments); violence; vomiting

W - weakness; use anything suitable as a weapon to threaten; whining; witchcraft; worry (anxiety); worship a rock singer

Y - yelling

Z - zone out



## Appendix B: Quick List of Bible References

The following is a list of common youth counseling topics and strongholds. For each there are listed several Bible references that can be applied in counseling that particular topic.

### ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD

- ""But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken"" (Matthew 12:36).
- "...each person was judged according to what he had done" (Revelation 20:13c).
- "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Romans 2:5).

### AGITATION or DISCONTENT or UNGRATEFULNESS

- "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).
- "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

### ANGER

- "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (Ephesians 4:31).
- "...Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26b-27).
- "...Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:19b-20).
- "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

### ARGUING or COMPLAINING

- "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (Philippians 2:14-16).
- "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels" (2 Timothy 2:23).

### ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

- "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:12-13).
- "...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"" (Hebrews 13:5b).
- ""My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand"" (John 10:27-29).

### BITTERNESS

- "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (Ephesians 4:31).
- "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:15).

### CONFESSING SINS

- "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).
- "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy"

(Proverbs 28:13).

-- "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:3-5).

#### COVETING or LUSTING

-- ""You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor"" (Exodus 20:17).

-- ""You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart"" (Matthew 5:27-28).

#### CUSSING or CURSING

-- ""You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name"" (Exodus 20:7).

-- "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:9-10).

-- "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips" (Colossians 3:8).

#### DISOBEDIENCE

-- "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth"" (Ephesians 6:1-3).

-- "[Jesus] replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it"" (Luke 11:28).

-- ""Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him"" (John 14:21).

#### DEPRESSION or SADNESS

-- "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3).

-- "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

-- "...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ...I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:11b;12b).

-- "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

-- "[The Lord] heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

-- "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Isaiah 61:2).

#### DRUNKENNESS

-- "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

-- "Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path. Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags" (Proverbs 23:19-21).

## FEAR

- "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).
- "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity [fear], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).
- ""Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell"" (Matthew 10:28).

## FIGHTING

- ""Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God"" (Matthew 5:9).
- ""...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."" (Matthew 5:44).
- "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?  
You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:1-3).

## GREED or MATERIALISM

- "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness" (1 Timothy 6:5-11).
- ""No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money"" (Matthew 6:24).
- "Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions"" (Luke 12:15).

## GUILT

- "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).
- "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:19-23).

## HATE or RACISM or FAVORITISM

- ""The second [greatest commandment] is this: `Love your neighbor as yourself.'"" (Mark 12:31).
- ""But I [Jesus] tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?"" (Matthew 5:44-46a).
- "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism" (James 2:1).
- "For God does not show favoritism [racism]" (Romans 2:11).

## HOMOSEXUALITY

- ""If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads"" (Leviticus 20:13).
- "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them

over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (Romans 1:24-27).

#### IMPATIENCE

-- "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Romans 15:1-2).

-- "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).

-- "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

#### JUDGING

-- "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things" (Romans 2:1).

-- ""Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"" (Matthew 7:1-2).

-- "Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it" (James 4:11).

#### IDOLATRY

-- ""You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..." (Exodus 20:3-5a).

#### INSECURITY

-- "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

-- ""For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"" (Jeremiah 29:11).

#### LAZINESS

-- "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

-- "One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys" (Proverbs 18:9).

-- "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work" (Proverbs 21:25).

#### LYING or SLANDER

-- ""You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor"" (Exodus 20:16).

-- "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25).

-- "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:9-10).

-- "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."" (John 8:31-32).

#### MINDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

-- "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands,

just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

#### MOCKING

-- "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2).

-- "The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning" (Proverbs 14:6).

-- "If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer." (Proverbs 9:12).

#### OVEREATING (GLUTTONY)

-- "Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags" (Proverbs 23:20-21).

-- "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

-- "'Everything is permissible for me' --but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me' --but I will not be mastered by anything. 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food' --but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Corinthians 6:12-13).

#### PEER PRESSURE

-- "'Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong'" (Exodus 23:2a).

-- "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world..." (Romans 12:2a).

-- "My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, 'Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse'-- my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood" (Proverbs 1:10-16).

#### PRIDE

-- "'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (James 4:6b).

-- "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

-- "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor" (Proverbs 29:23).

-- "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10).

#### REBELLION

-- "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:1-2).

-- Under an (obsolete) Old Testament law, "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.'" Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid" (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

-- "Some [men] sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High" (Psalms 107:10-11).

## REVENGE

-- ""Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD"" (Leviticus 19:18).

-- "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:18-21).

## SALVATION

-- "...This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power..." (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

-- "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

-- "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time" (1 Corinthians 15:2-6).

-- ""For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"" (John 3:16).

-- "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9-10).

-- "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"" (John 14:6).

-- "...Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:31a).

-- "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:12-13).

## SELF-CONTROL

-- "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11-12).

-- "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

## SEXUAL IMMORALITY or WILD LIVING (DEBAUCHERY)

-- "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."; ..."Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:13b,18-20).

-- "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Ephesians 5:3).

-- "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned

you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).  
-- "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

#### SIN or UNREPENTANT

-- "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17).  
-- "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10).  
-- ""If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible"" (Leviticus 5:17).  
-- "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy"" (1 Peter 1:15-16).  
-- "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).  
-- "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8).  
-- "I cried out to him [God] with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer" (Psalm 66:17-19).

#### STEALING

-- ""You shall not steal"" (Exodus 20:15).  
-- "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28).  
-- "The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor" (Romans 13:9-10).

#### SUFFERING

-- "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).  
-- "To keep me from becoming conceited..., there was given me a thorn in my flesh, ...to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).  
-- "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:6-7).  
-- "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:19-24).

-- "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." ... "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (1 Peter 4:12-13,19).

-- "...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:3-5).

-- "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

#### TATTOOS

-- ""Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD"" (Leviticus 19:28).

#### TEMPTATION

-- "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

-- "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:13-14).

#### UNFORGIVENESS

-- "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

-- see Matthew 18:21-35 [verses 34a,35 - ""In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured... This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.""]

-- ""For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"" (Matthew 6:14-15).

-- "Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you-- for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others" (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22).

-- "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).

#### UNWHOLESOME TALK

-- "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29).

-- ""But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken"" (Matthew 12:36).

-- "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (Ephesians 5:3-4).

-- "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

#### WEAKNESS

-- "I can do everything through [Christ] who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

-- "...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

-- "...for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10c).



## WITCHCRAFT or MAGIC

-- "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so" (Deuteronomy 18:10-14).

## WORLDLINESS

-- "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15-16).

-- "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

-- "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (1 Corinthians 3:19a).

-- "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

-- "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:1-5).

## WORRY or ANXIETY

-- see Matthew 6:25-34 [verses 25,32b-34 - ""Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ...your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.""]

-- "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

-- "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

## Works Cited

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." The Bible Library CD-ROM. Oklahoma City: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

Bible. "New King James Version Bible." The Bible Library CD-ROM. Oklahoma City: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary." The Bible Library CD-ROM. Oklahoma City: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

\*\*End of Book\*\*