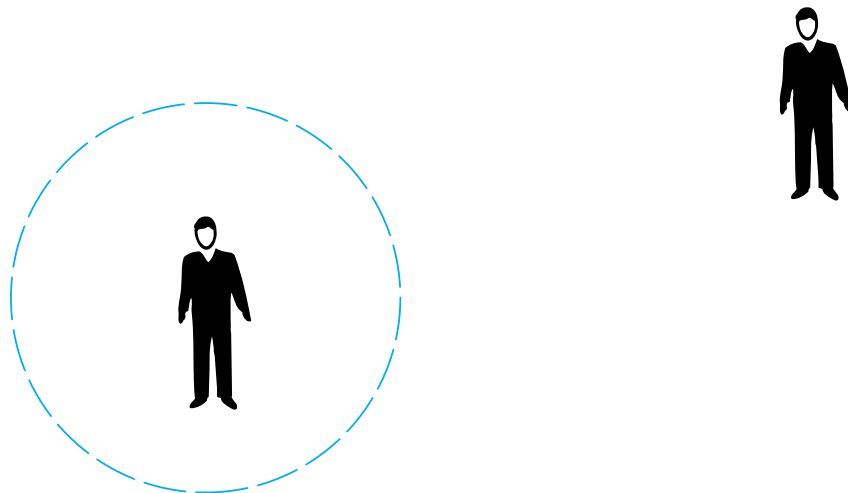


2. *The Principle of Authority*

The key to understanding authority is identifying four areas of God-ordained jurisdiction: *parents, government, church leaders, and employers*. When a decision is to be made, we must ask, “Whose jurisdiction is this under?” God gives direction, protection, and provision through human authorities. If we rebel against them, we expose ourselves to the destruction of evil *principalities*, who take jurisdiction over specific places and people. This is why “*rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.*” (See 1 Samuel 15:23).

Why are some authorities difficult?



The Need for Character Training

God is ultimately concerned with the development of our character, and He will often use difficult people to bring it about. Joseph was sold as a slave and was later unjustly imprisoned. However, these experiences were God’s “classrooms” to prepare Joseph for God’s purposes in his life. Character lessons not learned in youth must be repeated later. This is why many adult conflicts are actually youth conflicts that were never resolved.

WHY DO CONFLICTS OCCUR?

With any structure of authority, there will be tensions, because authorities establish laws, and those under authority tend to test the boundaries. God gave Adam and Eve only one limitation, and that is what they tested. Additional conflicts occur when those in leadership do not demonstrate wisdom, maturity, or love.

Unfulfilled Promises

Expectations damage relationships. When a person in leadership makes a promise and does not fulfill it, those under authority are hurt. If the hurts are not cleared up immediately, they turn into roots of bitterness, and “. . . *thereby many be defiled*” (Hebrews 12:15).

Pride

“*Only by pride cometh contention . . .*” (Proverbs 13:10). Pride is building my life around myself and not caring about the needs of others. Pride is reserving for myself the right to make final decisions and not submitting to the direction of God-given authority. Pride is thinking that I am better than others and judging them or looking down on them. Pride is refusing to ask for forgiveness of those whom I know I have offended.

Anger

“*He that soweth iniquity [self-will, especially in immorality] shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall [destroy]*” (Proverbs 22:8). The Fifth Commandment instructs children to honor their father and their mother. However, God also instructs fathers not to provoke their children to wrath. (See Ephesians 6:4.) When fathers respond to disappointments in anger or discipline in anger, they break the spirits of their children and provoke them to wrath.

A Wise Check-Up for a Leader

You might be amazed at the expectations you have created by suggesting things that you would like to do in the future. Ask each one under your leadership, “Have I ever made a promise to you that I have not yet fulfilled?” Be ready to write fast. Do not argue with their perceptions of what you said; just carry them out, if you can.

Whenever sons and daughters are asked, “What two changes would you like to see in your father?” they usually say, “If only he would not lose his temper, and if only he would ask for forgiveness when he is wrong.” These two qualities will prevent the tragic sequence that is described in the following chart.

ABNORMAL SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

PARENTS' RESPONSES	TEEN'S VISIBLE SIGNS	AREAS	TEEN'S INNER CONFLICTS	INSIGHTS
			1.	
			2.	
			3.	
			4.	
			5.	
			6.	
			7.	
			8.	

FOUR TYPES OF SUICIDE

1. MENTAL
(Drugs/Wrong Philosophies)

2. MORAL
(Surrender to Sensuality)

3. SPIRITUAL
(Occult)

4. PHYSICAL
(Death)

FOUR TYPES OF SUICIDE

1. MENTAL SUICIDE: Drugs, false philosophies

- **Drugs: Decreasing mental responsibility**—*II Corinthians 10:5*
Treatment: Fasting, memorizing Scripture
- **False philosophies: Leaves Christ out**—*Colossians 2:8*
Treatment: Same as above

2. MORAL SUICIDE: Surrendering to sensuality

- **Resistance to evil = Basis of life**
- **Consequence of lust = More lust**—*Galatians 6:7*

3. SPIRITUAL SUICIDE: Involvement in the occult

- **Three Stages of a Nation's Destruction**
 1. Rejection of God's Word
 2. Acceptance of immorality
 3. Satanic worship
- **Consequences**
 1. Irrational fears
 2. Unexplained nervousness
 3. Illogical, fragmented thinking
 4. Inability to respond to God
- **Solution**
 1. Confess specific involvement—*I John 1:9*
 2. Claim the blood and name of the Lord Jesus Christ—*Revelation 12:11*

4. PHYSICAL SUICIDE: Death—*Hebrews 9:27*

Tearing Down the Strongholds of Bitterness

Regaining surrendered “ground” brings moral purity.

1. Practice drawing and explaining the diagram on bitterness.

- **Draw the grid**—This represents our souls (our minds, wills, and emotions).
- **Darken one square**—According to Ephesians 4:26–32, we surrender an area of our souls to Satan when we are bitter toward someone. Satan then has the legal right to construct a stronghold on his property.
- **Draw the stronghold**—A stronghold is a way of thinking that is contrary to God’s will. From his stronghold, Satan torments us with fear, anger, worry, and other destructive emotions.
- **Draw arrows to other squares**—God tells us in Scripture that He will turn us over to the tormentors if we do not forgive our offenders. If we try to fight the tormentors, Satan simply retreats to his stronghold and waits for another opportunity to attack. We will never gain true freedom until we tear down the stronghold; however, we cannot tear down the stronghold until God reclaims the ground.
- **Write out the steps of action**—Explain each step and quote the related Scripture. Ask the person if he or she would like to conquer bitterness.
- **Lead the person in prayer for the first three points**—Then in a separate prayer encourage the person to forgive his or her offender.

2. Memorize the key verses that are used in this diagram.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 4:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 4:26–27 | <input type="checkbox"/> II Corinthians 10:1–5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 18:34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 6:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 12:15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I John 1:9 | <input type="checkbox"/> I John 2:9 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 23:3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 4:31–32 | <input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 12:11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Colossians 2:14–15 |

3. Write out how you tore down a stronghold of bitterness.

Record your own experience of applying this material. List the character qualities that God is building into your life as a result of being hurt.

4. Keep a journal of helping others conquer bitterness.

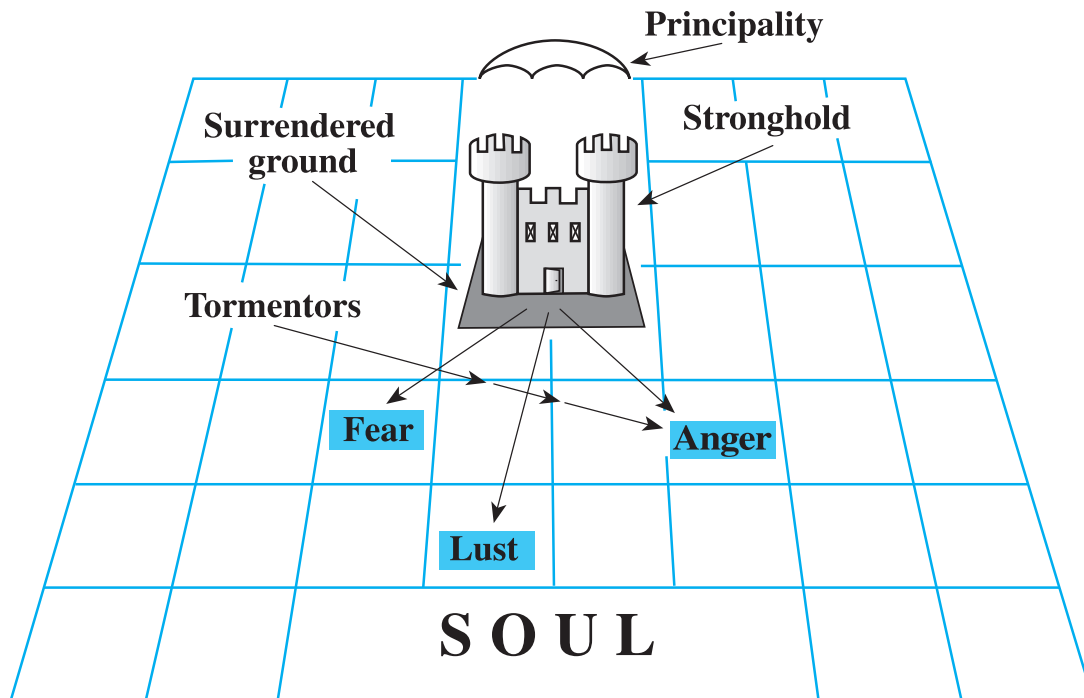
Keep a record of the questions and comments of those with whom you share this material. As you think back over your conversations, you will discover new insights on and applications of this universal principle of suffering.

5. Encourage those whom you help to write out their testimonies.

After sufficient time has confirmed that those with whom you talked are truly free from their bitterness, encourage them to write out their testimonies and give you a copy. These written testimonies will not only encourage them but will also help you identify further insights on how to conquer the stronghold of bitterness.

BATTLEGROUND OF THE SOUL

Tearing Down Strongholds of Bitterness



Soul: Our minds, wills, and emotions vs. spirit (Greek *psuchē*)—[Hebrews 4:12](#)

Ground: Jurisdictional area (*place* in our souls)—[Ephesians 4:27](#)

Stronghold: Mind-set and conclusions contrary to Scripture—
[II Corinthians 10:4–5](#)

Tormentors: Afflictions allowed by God to teach us mercy—[Matthew 18:34](#)

Principality: A ruler of evil over a jurisdictional area—[Ephesians 6:12](#)

Steps of Action:

- 1.** Confess the sin of bitterness—[Hebrews 12:15](#); [I John 1:9](#)
- 2.** Ask God to regain surrendered ground—[Psalm 23:3](#)
- 3.** Tear down strongholds with truth—[II Corinthians 10:4–5](#)
- 4.** Show mercy by forgiving your offender—[Matthew 6:14–15](#)

Key Points to Share on How to Tear Down . . .

the Strongholds of Bitterness

Our Souls

• THE PROBLEM

- Bitterness defiles our souls.**

In our pursuit of *“peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,”* we are to watch diligently that no one resists the grace of God. Otherwise, there can very easily spring up in us roots of bitterness. By this means, *“many be defiled.”* (See Hebrews 12:14–15.)

• THE CONSEQUENCE

- Bitterness weakens our souls.**

If we pursue that which is evil, God may allow us to have the evil desires of our hearts but send *“leanness into our souls.”* (See Psalm 106:15.) Leanness decreases the capacity of our souls to respond to God and to follow His ways.

• THE SOLUTION

- Lost ground can be regained.**

The promise of Psalm 23:3 is especially significant: *“He restoreth my soul.”* As our Shepherd, the Lord leads us in the *“paths of righteousness”* and *“prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies.”* (See Psalm 23:3, 5.)

“Ground”

• THE DEFINITION

- A jurisdictional area of our souls**

We are warned that bitterness will *“. . . give place to the devil”* (Ephesians 4:27). The word for *place* in the Greek means *“an area of legal control.”* In a kingdom, the jurisdiction is determined by the ground under the authority of the king.

• THE PROBLEM

- Surrendered ground brings torment.**

When the devil is given ground in a person’s soul, he has the legal right to build strongholds on that ground and use it as a base of operations to torment other areas of the soul.

• THE SOLUTION

- Ground is regained a step at a time.**

Every time we allow the sun to go down upon our wrath, we give more ground to Satan, according to Ephesians 4:26–32. There may be many individuals toward whom we are bitter. In warfare, ground that is surrendered to the enemy must be regained a foot at a time.

Strongholds

• THE DEFINITION

- A false pattern of thinking**

God warns us not to be deceived by vain philosophies which are *“. . . after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”* Believing these philosophies will allow Satan to *“spoil”* (plunder) our souls. (See Colossians 2:8.)

• THE CONSEQUENCE

- Decisions contrary to God’s will**

When Satan constructs a line of reasoning in our minds that is contrary to Scripture, he then influences our wills to make wrong decisions. Wrong decisions produce destructive emotions such as fear, anger, depression, and worry.

• THE SOLUTION

Strongholds can be pulled down.

We have been given weapons that are “. . . mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (II Corinthians 10:4). These weapons of truth are designed to cast down every false philosophy and every deceptive imagination and bring every thought into line with the truth of Christ’s teaching.

EXAMPLES OF STRONGHOLDS

• “My offender will never change.”

Based on this false conclusion, Satan convinces husbands and wives to divorce each other, children to rebel against their parents, employees to quit their jobs, and factions to begin in churches.

Yet God states, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27).

God instructs wives that their demonstration of a meek and quiet spirit and learning how to show sincere honor to their husbands may win their husbands who do not believe the Scriptures. (See I Peter 3:1–2.)

God urges husbands to love their wives and not be bitter toward them. When a husband loves his wife with *agape* love, his wife becomes a treasured “helpmeet.” (See Ephesians 5:25–33.)

• “I must punish my offender.”

God promises to punish our offenders if they continue to reject the gracious appeals of those they offend. It is not our place to bring retaliation; we must allow the wrath of God to take its course. “. . . Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

When we take matters into our own hands in order to get even with our offenders, we miss out on the special blessing that God will give those who conquer by love, and we bring destruction to our own physical health, attitudes, and relationships.

Tormentors

• THE DEFINITION

Powers of evil that afflict our souls

When the servant who had been forgiven the huge debt refused to forgive one who owed him a little debt, he was rebuked by his lord and delivered over “. . . to the tormentors” (Matthew 18:34; see also verses 23–34).

The verb form of the Greek word for *tormentors* in this passage means “to torture.” Its root word means “to cause pain and toil; to produce anguish and vexation of soul.”

• THE PROBLEM

God sends tormentors to bitter people.

In the parable of the unjust steward, the lord rebuked the servant who refused to forgive an offender: “. . . I forgave thee all that debt . . . Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?

“And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him” (Matthew 18:32–34).

A bitter person becomes a prisoner of his own making; he is angry, discouraged, depressed, disillusioned, and unable to concentrate on his responsibilities or enjoy the relationships which God designed for him to have.

• THE SOLUTION

Understand the meaning of mercy.

In the parable of the unjust steward, the debtor did not plead for mercy; he simply asked for an extension of time. “. . . Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all” (Matthew 18:26).

The lord delivered him to the tormentors so he could come to the realization that he would never be able to pay back his debt. If he would then plead for mercy, the lord would forgive him the entire debt. Then, having experienced mercy, he would be able to show mercy to his offenders.

Understand Your Weapons . . .

to Tear Down the Strongholds of Bitterness

• PREPARATION

If we have given “ground” to Satan, we are under the influence of his principalities, powers of evil, and rulers of darkness.

The Book that warns us not to “*give place to the devil*” by bitterness also tells us, “. . . *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Ephesians 6:12).

Scriptural steps by which we are able to conquer Satan and destroy his strongholds are given in the following passage.

• THEY OVERCAME HIM BY . . .

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony . . .” (Revelation 12:11).

The blood of the Lamb

Satan and all his hosts were present at the crucifixion of Christ. At the time Jesus was nailed to the cross, He snatched the legal document that Satan held in his hand.

That document had given Satan authority over every person in the world. Jesus nailed the document to the cross and blotted out the handwriting on the document with His own blood.

Then He made an “open show” of Satan in the heavens. This expression refers to the practice of triumphant generals from Rome parading their conquered enemies through

the city streets, in order to demonstrate that these foes no longer had any authority or power over the people because they had been conquered and disarmed.

Based on what Christ did on the cross, the only authority Satan has today over us is that which we give him through rejection of what Christ accomplished or disobedience to His Word. These powerful truths are presented in the following passages:

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

“And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:13–15).

“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Revelation 1:5).

The word of their testimony

We appropriate the powerful work of Christ by placing our faith in Him and repenting from the works of the flesh that have dominated our lives. (See Colossians 2:6–12.)

Our way of giving testimony to this truth is by confessing our sin of bitterness, by asking God to regain the ground we gave Satan, by tearing down strongholds of unscriptural ideas, and by showing mercy to those who offend us.

We forgive others because God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us.

Steps of Action:

1. Confess the sin of bitterness.

Many of us excuse bitterness. We continually rehearse the damage done to us by our offenders, and in so doing, we justify our guilt with blame. We also redefine bitterness, by saying, "I'm not bitter; I was just deeply hurt." The fact remains that we have closed off our affections to our offender, and God says, "*He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now*" (1 John 2:9). Darkness is Satan's realm; thus the one who is bitter is living in sin and is under Satan's power.

However, "*if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9).

2. Ask God to regain surrendered ground.

According to Ephesians 4:26–27, we surrender ground to Satan every time we let the sun go down upon our wrath. For each of these occasions, we must ask God to regain the ground we gave to Satan. We have the assurance that God will hear our prayer in accordance with the comforting statement of Psalm 23:3, "*He restoreth my soul . . .*" The Hebrew word for *restore* means "returning to the starting point."

We should ask God to rebuke Satan in the name and through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and gain the ground that Christ won by His death, burial, and resurrection.

3. Tear down strongholds with truth.

It is God's responsibility to regain the ground we surrendered, but it is our responsibility to tear down the strongholds that Satan built on the territory. God has given us powerful weapons of truth to accomplish this task. "*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [bitter retaliation], but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds*" (II Corinthians 10:4).

We must purpose to search out and destroy every false idea or conclusion we have accepted from Satan and build up "towers of truth" by reading, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture.

4. Show mercy by forgiving your offender.

Now that we understand the spiritual destruction that comes with bitterness and how forgiveness is an aspect of mercy, we should have the motivation to fully forgive our offenders in the same way in which we have been forgiven by Christ. "*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:31–32).