

**DISMANTLING
THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF
GOOD AND EVIL WITHIN
SO LOVE CAN THRIVE**

RENE LAFAUT, MSc.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all those who struggle navigating relationships.
Those who have compulsive behaviors, and addictions.

ENDORSEMENT

It shows a great amount of wisdom concerning the Christian life that has been learned in the trenches.
It shows grace and love rather than a bare legalism.

Bill Reimer, Regent College, Vancouver, BC

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to acknowledge my family and friends for believing in me,
as I painfully arrived at the content found in this book.

I also want to acknowledge father George Aquaro for his insight into the connections between the seven deadly sins, that helped me so much in my personal development.

Foreword

I first met Rene in a Supermarket, stacking shelves. I stopped to speak to him because he knew my eldest son. In the brief conversation that followed I learned that he was putting himself through his Masters degree at the University of Alberta. Subsequent brief encounters established that in order to gain his Diploma he must discover something completely new to Mathematics, that to my mind made it a research project, and I related it to my son's research in his Genetics degree.

Well, math discussions led to spiritual talks and I discovered an open and enquiring soul. One thing led to another and I ended up inviting him to come to Church with me. My Pastor was a man who preached more than anything about God and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It was the focal point of every sermon. He literally drew people in their chairs into the love of Jesus. It wasn't evangelism per se - more just 'come taste and see'. He was totally authentic and Rene responded to the love of Jesus with committed zeal.

Rene completed the thesis for his Masters in two years instead of three and began his Doctorate in Mathematics at the University of British Columbia. Within the first year of his studies there the Schizophrenia struck. He was still able to pursue his math studies but the day to day living was fraught with illusions, distortions of taste, smell, emotion, and at worst hallucinations that were frightening, and seemed utterly real. Throughout the year he fought these manifestations of the disease, which he equated with attacks from the devil, with what he knew was true from memory. He strengthened himself to keep going by holding fast to scripture and by daily prayer with his mother, and sometimes with me. He was a desperate man, holding on to his faith and to reality as he could remember it. Over the year he lost maybe one hundred pounds in weight and his health was seriously in jeopardy.

I suggested that I believed the Lord wanted him to see a psychiatrist and his spirit confirmed it and so after a year of valiant struggle he pursued those channels. After grueling times in the hospital his disease was diagnosed and healing medications were prescribed. He never lost his loyalty to the person of Jesus as he remembered Him before the schizophrenia struck. But he could no longer pursue the mathematics in front of him as he felt tortured and gutted within from his schizophrenia which impaired his ability to properly focus on and do the math at hand.

His path after diagnosis was to survive the intense uncomfortableness of his illness and to find a way forward to self-sufficiency after being classified as a person with disability.

Over the last 20 odd years or so Rene lived a life of faith in the promises of God, regained all his faculties and senses, written several books besides this one, while working full time in a Janitorial service. Ten years ago he met a wonderful woman who he has been married to for 9 years now.

He will be on medications the rest of his life and has to deal with the consequences from his illness, but this struggle has made him amazingly sensitive to the inner workings of thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, actions, motivations, and focuses. It is in this place that God was able to teach Rene how to be healed of spiritual wounds and sin strongholds. Rene has undertaken to share this working process with us in this book.

This book contains a framework, a language, and an invitation from Jesus to grow gradually in spirit and practically in love in a mature and lasting way through a humble process of strategic prayer to and relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God the Father.

Anita Patel
Fellow Traveler

1 Introduction

This book was written in response to questions I had accumulated over the years, as I struggled with getting rid of “sin strongholds” (those things that go against self-love, people-love, and God-love), that I was powerless to change all by myself. I confessed my struggles to spiritual directors, priests, and those I trusted with my baggage, over many years. But I felt none of them had the necessary experience, or had lived with as hard a heart or as confused a mind like I had, to fully deal with my issues; they had never walked in my shoes. Yet, I was open to the wisdom that came my way and helped me to navigate life until the contents of this book were slowly revealed and successfully administered to me in prayer.

Ultimately, I ended up embracing God, my Bible, and input from the body of Christ¹, and I decided to let them speak to me. I did not have immediate revelations that answered all my questions all at once, but I began to journey with God. And God used uncomfortable circumstances and awkward moments I had with people, to show me what was in my heart, so that we could work on cleaning up my life from the inside out.

The Gospel’s invitation to its hearers is to repent and believe in Jesus. However, the word “repent” is often misunderstood, both by those outside and inside the church, because of so much hypocrisy and powerlessness to make it real. The “how-to” part of repentance is not well understood, and very confusing to many people who struggle with sin strongholds and experience guilt, shame, powerlessness, and condemnation from others.

Personally, I began to discover that my vocabulary, understanding, and practice of basic Christian tenets was weak, and that led to me searching for revelations on how to repent from my strongholds of sin; and how to change my negative, unloving attitudes to become a more positive person—with Jesus’ gracious help, promises, and truth found in Scripture. I started to learn how to process my emotional baggage within and how to navigate my conflicts with others in a more healthy manner. The “how-to” part was not immediately obvious to me for the longest time even though I believed I was a Christian who had gone through many serious trials without losing my faith.

Having said this, many people go to church thinking everything is right in their souls: they have supposedly arrived, they are the correct package, or they keep all the rules (and they think that they belong for such reasons). But none of us are the complete package; only Jesus is. The fact is, we sin—sometimes grossly and sometimes repeatedly. If we are honest, we realize that even

¹ Cf. Chapter fourteen for those authors whose books helped to point me in healthy directions so I could eventually enter more deeply into the healing process that Jesus was leading me through.

with cleaning up the outside, there are often many unresolved issues or sinful habits that we likely don't have the desire, commitment, energy or know-how to overcome. We often focus only on one or two issues in our lifetime because we don't know how to start cleaning up even a little of the stuff in our hearts that we feel guilty about. We don't understand what is happening in our hearts that causes us to sin habitually.

I am learning to conquer many of the sin strongholds in my life, through Jesus' promises, teachings, commands, authority, power (grace), truths, and presence. And I want to share how I am experiencing this process with you. Having said this, I am a sinner and I ask for grace when receiving communion; I don't earn it. Confessing sin and working on repentance is more important to God than preparing to receive communion by abstaining from all visible sins just prior to communion. A thorough cleaning job is better than cosmetic changes; if I can repent from serious sin, I should do so, to restore myself to a state of grace.

The invitation from God that I accepted, to change for spiritual and relational health reasons, isn't based on deep mysteries, or complex doctrines, but on the basic teachings of Jesus Christ. But this Good News was forgotten by me soon after conversion, discounted as "too easy to be true," and later jettisoned as only being important for "baby-Christians." The reason I didn't make progress for a long time and didn't grow into maturity as a Christian is because I thought I knew better and had moved onto greener pastures. However, real change comes slowly and only comes to those who don't give up, to those who do search for how to care for and love people, and to those that don't discount or despise the simplicity of the Gospels.

There is a lot of theology in this book that I use to support my take on how I've learned to repent. It should not be looked at as a system, or set of laws that need to be conformed to for there to be freedom. Freedom only comes from abiding in Jesus and He lets us know, when we are listening, what needs to be believed and practiced. No finite set of rules, principles, or codes is enough to solve all our problems—and this applies to this book. Rules create pressure not freedom; but healthy relationships do create freedom. So, if God speaks to you in some context through this book, embrace it when it happens, but the focus should always be on what Jesus is showing you.

As with all books that talk about the possibility of change, there is a caution with this one. When I have been set free by a truth and grace, in an area that may have plagued me for decades, my impulse has often been to carry the truth to an extreme. I forget about grace, I get proud, and I start to judge and hurt people because of my twisted slant on things. Unfortunately, church history has witnessed many people in authority trying to muzzle truths that seem dangerous and threatening to them or the status quo. Whatever the place of authority in the church is, and they do have a place, if one can't embrace truth, one embraces fear. When I encounter a new truth I usually don't grasp all of its aspects immediately. I need to wrestle with it until I

understand its limitations, and its freeing power through grace. I need the freedom to make mistakes and that means sometimes taking things too far. Without this freedom to make mistakes I wouldn't learn and grow in the freedom to love or mature like I have.

The Gospel of John says Jesus is full of grace and truth. I have learned that I need Jesus and the grace and truth He offers, if I want my sin strongholds to lose their power and their structures to be dismantled.

The sin strongholds I speak about in this book erected an ugly superstructure in my heart for a very long time, and can fittingly be called “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within. And this structure needed to be replaced with love. I have learned some tools to do just that in this book.

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” is a structure made from commitments to beliefs and expectations based on lies, sin, guilt, and fears rooted in wounds from broken relationships that negatively impact our relational lives.

The three major categories of sin (unhealthily seeking power, sex, and money) characterize “the tree of knowledge of good and evils”; its building blocks: “resentments, fear and pride,” its branches: “abandoning love, compulsive-laziness, and compulsive-indulging”; and “coveting, judging, and selfishness.” respectively. These are commonly revealed to us through broken relationships, business dealings, wars, history, the news, TV, radio, internet, movies, magazines, or read about in books. In rejecting God, we seek power to carry out our plans to survive, and to make a name for ourselves just like those who built the Tower of Babel, as is recorded in the book of Genesis. Just as many people in the church are growing this hideous tree within themselves, as those outside of the church. We are all fallen.

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” within us, consists of a dark energy stretching and giving life to those detestable building blocks and branches of bad fruit. It needs to be dismantled for love to thrive.

Here is an overview of this book:

- Chapter 1 is the introduction.
- In chapter 2, I talk about the power of the “sin nature” vs. “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me, and how they differ on their impact in my life. Understanding this helps me to choose my battles wisely.
- In chapter 3, I give a description of the methodology God gave me so I could enter a deeper transforming friendship with Him, like He promised me a long time ago. This chapter shows what I learned to expect from God, and what energy and humility is needed for real change.

- In chapter 4, I start to describe how I've learned to dismantle "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within me. I give key Scriptures that are used to drive the methodology and some definitions of Christian jargon that make transformation possible in this life; without them little but cosmetic change is possible. In the next five chapters, I attempt to show the connections between the different parts belonging to "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," to help us pray through them more thoroughly and help to dismantle them in the varying contexts of our lives.
- In chapter 5, I expand my discussion on the process of transformation, by talking about broken relationships and our search for peace in the wrong places—which is where "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" deceptively comes from.
- In chapter 6, I explain how to heal fear and its related vices, which are a part of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." I talk about healing self-pity, worry, pressure, cowardice, and conceit which are all ingredients that allow the tree to grow wildly.
- In chapter 7, I explain how to kill the stronghold of pride from the tree, and grow humility instead. Deeply renewing the mind with healthy, strategic truths and thinking, is key to stopping the tree's growth. Arrogance, pressure, and using force are also related ingredients that allow this tree to grow wildly.
- In chapter 8, I explain how I stop using people, and prune the related vices of compulsive-laziness and compulsive-indulging from "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" and how I grow healthy habits instead.
- In chapter 9, I explain how I give up my coveting, envious and jealous ways, and prune the related vices of judging, anger, addiction, moral policing, greed, and selfishness from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil," and how to grow kindness and generosity instead.
- In chapter 10, I summarize what was discussed in the previous chapters and provide troubleshooting tips if you get stuck.
- Chapter 11, I give six successful personal examples of how to work and pray so certain parts of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" can be dismantled within you.
- Chapter 12, I present an alternative tree to replace "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" whose source is God and is accessed through a humble faith relationship.
- Chapter 13 outlines my conclusion.

There are many graphic and coarse examples of sin strongholds in this book. They are brutal, ugly, selfish, proud, arrogant, hostile, mean, hurtful, and often angry—and, they are mine. They sprout from unhealthy beliefs that grew their way into my subconscious, as I foolishly tried to suppress emotional baggage and not process any of it in a healthy manner.

Whenever I believed a devil's lie about myself and the people I knew, a false thought pattern was formed and over the years these developed into strongholds. As these were reinforced and other negative thought patterns added to it resulted in a tangled mess that had little basis in reality, functioned mainly from my subconscious mind and made a huge mess in my interior and relational life. I ended up stuffing away the bad energy that came from inside of me, and I kept believing the devil's lies for years. I didn't know how to wash away what was inside of me, even though I wanted to be clean. I did not know how to get healed, but I really wanted the healing. I did not like my lack of love and I did not know what to do about it until God gave me the answers found in this book. Lies usually sound good to us when we believe them, but the consequences of doing so are often horrible. Lies always have catches.

Words of advice:

1. Don't isolate yourself: I did not find any healing when I isolated myself and put my own needs selfishly before others. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates this well: it has a priest who cares more about his spiritual state than a wounded person on the side of the road. When I care more about "not sinning" than loving the people in my life, then I won't grow in God's grace. The way to healing is to seek to love, and that means putting people before concepts and other idols. Seeking to love—not waiting until I'm healthy enough, or until it is easier to love—is the path to growing in love. I see difficulties and obstacles as my classroom in this process of learning to love.
2. Acknowledge you are God's instrument: I don't produce good fruit, but I bear it—to use the True Vine allegory from John 15. All of the virtues (goodness, love, compassion, mercy, and grace) that come out of me are a result of the Holy Spirit. He performs His work through me. I am an instrument God uses. A long time ago, God told me that He was digging tunnels of love within me. When I love, the Holy Spirit lives in me and uses me as His instrument of love. God gets the glory.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.²

² Galatians 2:20

Admitting that I am God's instrument is what honest pride acknowledges. I concede that God is the Author, Mastermind, Life Giver, and Peace Giver that is responsible for whatever good comes out of me. When Paul says, "We no longer live," he means we no longer live according to the flesh or "sin nature" but we are now dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

3. Keep your attention on God: Focusing primarily on Jesus' presence and grace, and secondly on little "t" truths that are God's wisdom spoken into the situation at hand. This will bring stability in navigating life's obstacles to love, because they keep me from using anger and self-pity for selfish reasons.
4. Don't just go through the motions: I no longer assume that doing things that require effort will always become easy through prayers, or that by coasting through life I can do God's will. Going by what feels good is never a good idea when it comes to living a healthy life. Practicing self-control, doing acts of love, and working in a useful manner is the path to life. If I do abandon effort, initiative and caring, and instead coast through life seeking pleasure, then I negate the useful strategies found in this book. And "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" will not die, and the "flesh" or "sin nature" will help to strengthen this tree's domination over our relationships.

All sins that attempt to get us what we desire end up hurting others: exploitation, greed, compulsive-laziness, selfishness, pride, judging, compulsive-indulging, angry pressure, force, hatred, and meanness directed at others and ourselves to better our positions in life, or acquire material things, or spiritual things we covet. It all ends up hurting us immediately and stays with us on into the future, if not processed healthily. The strategies outlined in this book helped me learn to love myself, others, and God more deeply. We can't love God if we don't love others and ourselves. When I pray, like I suggest in this book, I have often got in touch with and felt the powerful rawness and intense sensitivity of the wound within me. And I eventually realized that I needed to learn how to love myself to help the raw wound be healed. If I don't love myself, God's love can't get through to me, or as deeply as I need Him too.

Asking God to heal the sin within me, confessing the sin I commit against myself and others, repenting in prayer, renewing my mind and attitudes towards myself and others, gently submitting to God daily and resisting the devil—all help to bring inner and relational healing to me.

All sin strongholds are immature, self-centered, and self-pitying. The way for me to progress has been to uproot my bad attitudes—by giving up the lies and immature beliefs I had incorporated into my whole life: my thinking, my beliefs, my personality, my character, my actions, and my internal structures. I couldn't take giant leaps to maturity overnight. I realized that each lesson needed to be fully explored, understood, put into practice.

"God comforts me, consoles me, refreshes me but He does not want me to become stuck with

Him forever changing my diapers, so He wisely puts challenges or things that bring discomfort in my path to urge me forward to growth so my path doesn't become stagnant.”³

I found that I must fully master each lesson in order for progress to be made, so that what St. Paul said could eventually come true in my life:

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.⁴

Sometimes we can have very valid concerns but the methodology to stand up for them or to carry them out can be very unhealthy. The mode in which we attempt to carry out good causes can either be childish or mature. It can be done or demanded crudely, meanly, angrily, in self-pity; this all needs to be jettisoned. Valid concerns still need to be embraced, but with gentleness, respect, kindness, honor, peace, and acceptance; we can't demand things to always go our way. Instead we submit in kindness, letting the truth speak up for itself.

Even when we have a good cause we can be mean and judgmental, and proudly, intolerantly developing and carrying out our cause. This needs to be repented from.

You might notice, in starting to read this book, that you feel more judgmental in some ways. If this is the case, then the book is triggering what has only been hidden from you in your heart and mind up until now. As one perseveres in applying the principles found in this book, what is in you that gets triggered will eventually be dismantled, with Jesus' grace and truth. And you will become more tolerant, compassionate, caring, and loving towards the people in your life. So don't give up reading and applying this book to your life.

The book of James, in chapter 3, says (and I paraphrase): “where the tongue goes, the body follows suit.” I'm pained at how true this has been in my life when I speak negatively. When I seek to control situations or people I use my words. With my speech, I judge what is pleasurable and I hurt people. "The tree of knowledge of good and evil" within me is heavily influenced by how I use my tongue: lies spring from my tongue, lies caused this tree to grow stronger and more twisted over time, and lies helped me hurt others. My tongue speaks from the abundance of what is stored in my heart either for good or for evil. What is stored in my heart are my beliefs, loyalties, desires, and commitments; and I often end up believing what I carelessly speak.

It is fitting then, that through prayer (the tongue) and with God's help, this unhealthy “tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me can be dismantled. This is usually a gradual process, and it is a good idea to say the prayers we learn to craft in this book repeatedly, going deeper until

³ This thought comes from my friend Mark Munn.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:11

the strongholds are completely dismantled and uprooted. Also, learning to give thanks to God for the practical progress, forgiveness, and healing that come our way helps to brighten our attitudes and lessen the unwanted burdens. It's all about freedom to love.

This book is about inner healing. Sin in the Bible is defined as spiritual sickness. When we are healed from the sin within us (think sin strongholds), then we become healthy again and freedom results in that area.

If you need to repent, then the approach found in this book is useful, but the enemy is not always the "sin nature" or "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." In some cases, demonization and delusional types of mental illnesses may need to be addressed as possible diagnoses and healed with other medicines, especially when repenting does not work in certain contexts of one's life.

2 The Power Of My Sin Nature Vs. The Tree Of Knowledge Of Good And Evil Within

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” is not the same as the “sin nature.” Why is it that one person has no addictions, while another can’t stop eating or getting drunk? Why is it that one person has spiritual pride, whereas another is humble about spiritual things? Why is it that one person gets jealous so easily, while another person is more altruistic? Is one person’s “sin nature” better than another person’s “sin nature”? No, there is a level playing field. But we can allow our “sin nature,” together with our choices and folly, to grow “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in us; a structure of death and bad fruit (hatred, malice, addictions and negativity) that tries to push everyone away from us.

Yes, the “sin nature” can make us judge, worry, be proud, be jealous, be greedy, focus on selfish love, overeat, and be lazy. But these only become strongholds when they become compulsive, and when they do, they form a part of the structure within that is called “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” And this tree is merciless.

In this chapter, I develop a rationale for how “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” develops within us, and is acted on by the “sin nature”; fear and pride in the context of relational conflicts, challenges, and foolishness. The diagram below shows two-continuums of behavior where we can find ourselves. In the center is the place of humility, where there is awareness of our self-preservation and connectedness to our altruism; these two natures are healthy God-given qualities.



But within us is a dark energy, force, or pull known as the “sin nature” or the “flesh” that tries to pull us away from humility (spiritual healthiness) through fear (of having to love in sacrificial ways), and pride. We are driven towards extremes on both sides: pseudo self-preservation (coveting, jealousy, and selfishness) on the right, and pseudo altruism (lust or selfish-love) on the left (pseudo meaning “not genuine”). I have found that when I grow in humility I move along either continuum towards the center, but even when I am near the center I will feel my self-preservation and altruism being pulled and harassed by the “sin nature.” One can get self-preservation confused with selfishness when one doesn't understand the pull of the “sin nature.” When I don’t jump the gun and patiently wait, then I see the difference. The more one

moves away from the center the more one acts out of lies that inspire fear and pride.

The sense of self-preservation within us is strong, and we need to acknowledge it as a gift from God. The pull to the right by the “sin nature”, through fear and pride is strong too, and should not be ignored. To annihilate the “sin nature” is an impossibility in this life. Yes, I can kill the strongholds of fear and pride, but I can't kill the “sin nature” within me. God grants me grace, truth, and strategies to say, “I accept you, but I don't need you right now,”⁵ directly to the “sin nature.” When these attitudes rear their ugly heads (usually through angry pressure mixed with self-pity and possibly ugly demands), I pray: “I give it up, with your help Jesus, through faith”; so I can say yes to Jesus' peace (known as the Holy Spirit); and I ask Him to overcome my sin instead.⁶ But I will always feel the pull to the extreme right in this life.

My sense of altruism is strong too, and I need to acknowledge it as a gift from God, not as a badge of honor that gets me God's favor. The “sin nature” tries to draw me to the left: congratulating me on noble acts; trying to motivate me with fears of rejection and losses of honor; trying to move me with pride and conceit; and pushing me towards a reputation of goodness that is actually full of selfish-love, empty love, and self-righteousness. The fear is one of not being accepted, welcomed, loved, and cared for. My conceit in action (also known as “the ego” going bad) actually steals genuine honor and real love directed towards me, and I need to say, “I accept you, but I don't need you right now” to it. When this dark energy within rears its ugly head, then I pray, “I give it up, with your help Jesus, through faith”; so I can say, yes to Jesus' peace (known as the Holy Spirit), and ask I Him to overcome my sin. It's important to note, that in saying, “no” to the “sin nature” I give it a firmer place in my life to tempt me that it doesn't deserve.

"It is in dying that we are born again," comes from a prayer inspired by St. Francis of Assisi's life, and it is often used in conjunction with St. Paul's statement: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain,"⁷ These might seem to justify the idea that we can kill the “sin nature” but in fact this is impossible. We incorrectly put pressure on ourselves to do this through anger and self-hatred so we can somehow love people more deeply, but this is a horrible trap. We can't crucify ourselves or our “flesh”, and we can't kill the “sin nature”; but we can kill the strongholds mentioned in this book with Jesus' help. When St. Paul used the word “die” he was referring to physical death and being united with Jesus in heaven. We can't add anything to Jesus or what He has done to be any better.

When I saw that all people have a “sin nature within, that the Bible calls the “flesh,”⁸ then I

⁵ Insight from my friend Suda.

⁶ Cf. Romans 8:2,13

⁷ Philippians 1:21

⁸ Cf. Romans 7:14-20

began to realize that we are all basically the same. There is no need to feel superior to others, to judge others, or to condemn others—and when I do, then I have spiritual pride. No matter how far I walk spiritually in this life, the “flesh” is still with me; any healthy righteousness within me always comes from God. I have nothing to boast about (not even about God’s Spirit within me) because I am not better than anyone else.

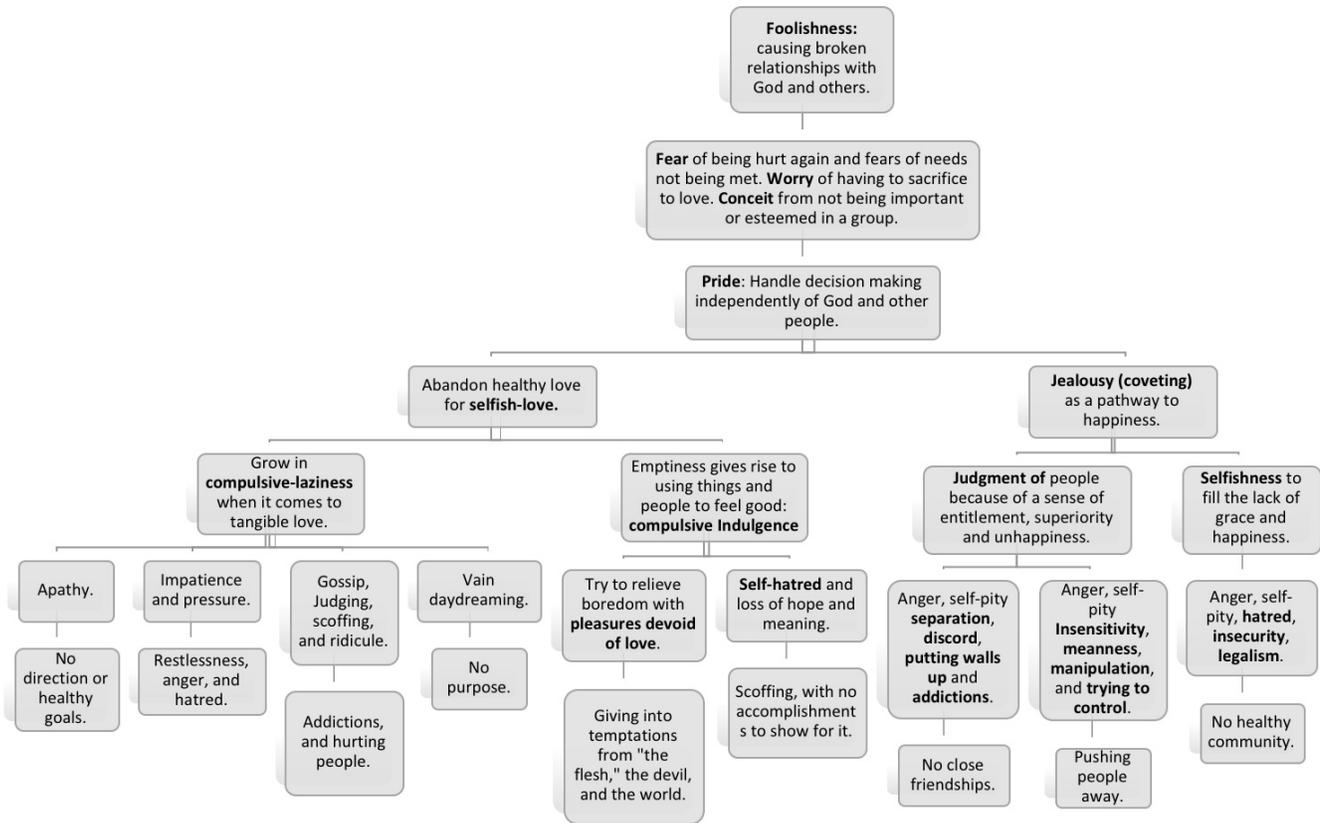
Pseudo altruism is basically selfish-love—also known as lust. This is illustrated on the left side of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” below (see diagram). Pseudo self-preservation is basically coveting, jealousy, and selfishness and is illustrated on the right side of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Lies inspire fears; and pride together with the “sin nature” try to push me to these two extreme and incomplete perversions of healthy humility.

The power of the “sin nature” works to establish the strongholds of fear, pride, coveting, jealousy, judging, selfishness, using people, compulsive-indulging, compulsive-laziness and the sins that come from them. These strongholds can be dismantled in my life, but the “sin nature” can’t be dismantled. The glue that holds this tree-structure together are the lies we believe about the nature of God, people, and ourselves—relationally, and in the context of conflicts, trauma, attacks, and challenges. Lies trigger broken relationships, that trigger fear and guilt, and these work together with the strongholds, and make the “tree of knowledge of good and evil.” It is a powerful structure that has sought to dominate humanity since the Garden of Eden.

It is clear that if we have pride, saying we are the center of the universe, then we will seek to use people and things. This is called abandoning love, and that leads to compulsive-laziness (not wanting to love) and compulsive-indulging (seeking pleasure in unhealthy ways to fill the void).

If we have pride, then jealousy results too because we will covet what others have (in a selfish way) and judge others because we think we are better.

These sins of pride, using people, compulsive-indulging, compulsive-laziness, jealousy, judging, and selfishness are not just sins that happen and get relegated to the past. If we let them, they form a bad energy structure of misguided beliefs, commitments, and loyalties in our hearts that leads to a lack of character. This structure grows as we let our foolish loyalties rule, and the only way to change this is to dismantle it. The way I have experienced this structure is like the diagram below:



My structure has both similarities and differences to a tree diagram put forth by father George Aquaro on his *Orthodoxy and Recovery* blog. Both structures capture truths in their own contexts. His diagram’s context is “The state of a man without God”; my diagram’s context is about “A broken (imperfect) relationship with God and people” when conflict or trauma enters the scene. His diagram inspired mine and came at the right time.

This tree is a negative energy structure that is held together by hurts, fears, false beliefs and commitments to lies that results in sinful behavior. The very bottom row of the tree contains some of the more visible fruits of indulging in the nature of the tree (many harsher ones can be added). Obviously, this tree does not list all of the sins mentioned in the Bible, but it will do for our discussions. I will show the prescriptions God gave me on how to dismantle this tree within me, and how to replace it with practical life-giving wisdom, with the helping presence of the Holy Spirit.

The “tree of knowledge of good and evil” is an invitation to decide what is good and bad, while ignoring the God who sees everything. We do this when we cut out the cause and effects found in the spiritual realm that God wants us to be informed of, so we can make healthy and wise decisions. We aren't always well informed about the physical realm either. There is nothing wrong with our intellects, but when we decide to limit what we can know to space, time, matter, and energy—and ignore what is real but unseen—then we become foolish. The scope of

the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” is limited to what we can see through the natural world and our fallen human nature.

The following is how I think the “good” functions in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” as found in the book of Genesis:

1. Satan promised that Adam and Eve would experience both good and evil through “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” What he didn’t tell them was they would end up using the evil to get good things. Sin is taking a good thing by evil (unhealthy) means. Evils like cowardice, pride, abandoning love, compulsive-indulging, compulsive-laziness, jealousy, judging, and selfishness are the tools that we use, or are tempted to use, to get the good things we think we want and to avoid pain.

2. Often, the good found in “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” is one of raising (or idolizing) pleasure (usually experienced in the flesh) and happiness (usually experienced in the mind), above spiritual considerations (what is holy, healthy, and proper, as far as God’s design is concerned, when it comes to how we relate to God and each other).

3. The good behavior aimed for in this devilish tree is not rooted in real tangible rightness or spiritually healthy behaviors, as seen in God’s nature. It may often look like humility but its source tries to exult in human effort, will, goodness, intellect, and pedigree above God’s grace; it is devoid of dependence on God. It is not wise to search this out in people and judge them for it. Jesus is clear: judge and condemn not; leave judgments to God.

4. Pride in the world is often used to measure things as being either “better than” or “worse than”, instead of looking at parts of reality as either healthy or unhealthy.

I think that Satan sold the idea to Eve that the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” would get her and Adam to be as “special” as God. He wanted them to think God was holding out on them. The reason I think this is because the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” was the source of a dark kind of thinking where:

Good =

I’m more special because... or

Mine is more special because... or

You are less special because...

And where:

Evil =

I’m less special because... or

Mine is less special because... or

You are more special because...

This kind of knowledge is a shallow and hurtful paradigm of thought, rooted in disobedience, restlessness, anger, hatred, inferiority, fear and pride. And they bear the rest of the vices that all destroy wholesome, healthy community and peaceful relationships. This kind of knowledge slowly defaces the image of God within us (except for the grace of God in our lives). And in so doing this knowledge helps us to hate, kill, and relish revenge; “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” actions against everyone who crosses our paths, eventually seeking the death of all. It is devoid of love, joy, peace, humility, warmth, kindness, hope, gentleness, valuing people, caring, altruism, and being a living sacrifice in the healthiest sense possible.

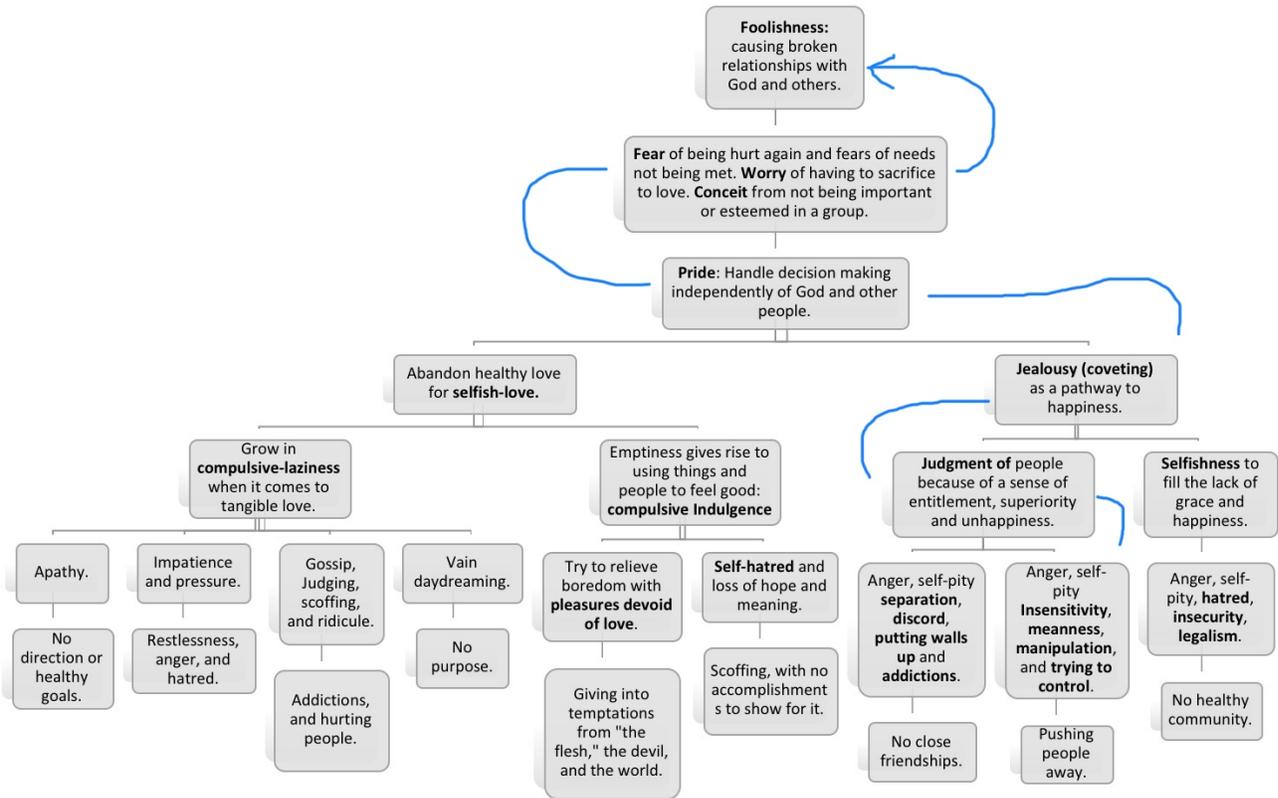
I have wrongly relied on the “sin nature” to try and save me from things that are uncomfortable in my life; using self-pity and anger to change my interior life, my circumstances, and my relationships. I only end up with guilt, meanness, restlessness, more anger and more self-pity linked to demands for my way to come through in the end—limited only by the presence of grace and mercy given by God.

The seed, structure, and fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” has infected all humanity: Adam, Eve and us, their fallen descendants. The tree’s infecting power is in the lies spoken to us that we too quickly and easily embrace because they promise us many things: instant peace, alleviation of fears, and the lie that God’s promises, provisions, and ways through darkness are not trustworthy. The devil promised independence, but made us slaves to sin; only Jesus can free us from this tangled mess through the Good News found in the New Testament (NT).

In this book we will focus on what are called “sin-conduit” structures that together form “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within. An example of such a structure is the one traced out in blue below.

One will learn how to confess and repent from these connected sins, attitudes, commitments and habits, with the help of God, and in the process dismantle them, so love can thrive. The dark-arrowed line goes upward because that is the order of how to process the structure and find freedom. The hidden power of each sin stronghold reaches from the roots to the branches of the tree like gravity or suction.

The “sin-conduit” structure below has the shorthand notation (right to left): “Foolishness=> Fear=> Pride=> Coveting and Jealousy=> Judging=> Meanness & Intolerance” in this instance, and fleshed out, can look something like this, with the anatomy table beneath it:



Meanness & Intolerance towards others	Judging	Coveting & Jealousy	Pride	Fear	Foolishness
	<=	<=	<=	<=	<= Cause and Effect
I want my will done (and I choose to do it meanly) instead of aiming for God's will to be done through me: i.e. "that I obey the Golden Rule".	Subconsciously or consciously I demanded: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" treatment towards those in my way... And I actually wanted karma visited on these people instead of grace.	I wanted to get my desires fulfilled ASAP demanding that others cooperate with me so I can get my way.	I see myself as the center of the universe. So my desires are more important than other people's.	I might have to get my hands dirty and love people other than myself. Believing the lie: "Loving people is too hard and unimportant".	People matter only insofar as they help me out with my chosen causes. I am committed to feeling as little pain as possible.
When I treated so and so disrespectfully...					
Confession & Repenting in Faith =>	=>	=>	=>	=>	

I have made many such anatomy tables, confessed and repented from the sins listed within them, and routed strongholds one after another with Jesus' help. I have included some of these tables as they are very helpful in aiming prayers and thoroughly covering all bases. I can't include them all for two reasons:

1. My dirty laundry involves many other people who I don't want to hurt or wound.
2. This book can only be so long.

Most of the prayers said in this book are very general, but keep in mind that I have persons or people in mind when praying them. So when you pray some of these prayers, or construct your own ones be as specific as possible as it will help going deeper with more healing coming your way.

All "sin-conduit" structures are dark, thirsty, compulsive energies seeking relief, stretching from the root to the branches of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." It is more like a vacuum, than a supply. It is more like a black hole than a warm sun. These dark energy streams inside me are only concerned about getting and taking things that I think will make me happy (the supposed good). This dark energy doesn't respect people or their boundaries. I need to say to this energy within me, "I accept you but I don't need you"; I need to commit myself to the Holy Spirit to have victory in each episode where this energy manifests. This dark energy is my "sin nature" and used by "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within. Sin is about taking and using. Love is about giving and receiving.

It only takes a small situation and sin to start growing "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within and its growth is not stagnant; it will grow as the years pass if left undealt with. The longer it's left the more gross it gets.

