

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

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DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this book to my beautiful wife Sophie who felt the brunt of my learning process through my psychosis as I arrived at the contents found in this book and learned to grow in tangible love.

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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1 INTRODUCTION

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

Ultimately, I landed up embracing God, my Bible and input from the body of Christ¹; and 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 with Him using triggers such as uncomfortable circumstance, 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 with His guidance.

The Gospel's invitation to its hearers is to repent and believe in Jesus. However, the word "repent" is often misunderstood by those outside and inside the church because of so much hypocrisy and powerlessness to make it real. The "how to do this part" of repentance is not well understood and very confusing to many people who struggle with bad habits and sin strongholds that bring guilt and shame besides powerlessness and condemnation from spectators.

Personally, I began to discover that my vocabulary, understanding, and practice of the Christian basics was weak and that led to me searching for and getting revelations on "how to repent" from my strongholds of sin, my addictive behaviors, and how to change my negative unloving attitudes to become a more positive person with Jesus' help (grace), promises, teachings and truth found in the Scriptures. I started to learn how to process my emotions and baggage within and learned how to navigate my conflicts more healthily. The "how to do this part" was not immediately obvious to me for the longest time even though I was a serious Christian who had gone through many serious trials without losing my faith.

Having said this, many people accept that in this life, they will never go to church with everything right in their souls, that they have supposedly arrived, that they got the package or are the correct package, or keep all the rules; nor do they suppose that anyone belongs for such reasons. None of us are the package: only Jesus is. Fact is, we sin, sometimes grossly, sometimes

¹ Cf. Chapter 14 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.

repeatedly. If one is honest, one realizes that even with cleaning up the outside, there are often many unresolved issues or sin habits that we likely don't have the desire, commitment, energy or know how to overcome. And we often come to accept that we will focus on one or two issues in our life times because we don't know how to start cleaning up even a little of the stuff in our hearts that we feel guilty about, because we don't understand what is happening in our hearts that causes us to sin habitually.

I am learning to conquer together with Jesus many of the sin strongholds in my life through His promises, teachings, commands, authority, power (grace), truths, and presence; and I want to share the outline on how I am experiencing this process, with the reader. Having said this, I am a sinner and I go for grace when receiving communion, I don't earn it by being in a state of grace. Being in a state of grace is good, but confessing sin and working on repentance so love will blossom is more important to God than supposedly being prepared to receive communion because one is abstaining from all (or, is it most?) visible sins just prior to communion. A thorough cleaning job is better than cosmetic changes in most people's eyes; I think God agrees. However, I think that if I can repent from serious sin, I should do so to restore me to a state of grace.

I need to say that the invitation from God that I accepted to change for spiritual relational-health reasons written about in this book isn't based on deep mysteries, or complex doctrines, but on the basic teachings of the Good News of Jesus Christ that was forgotten by me soon after conversion, discounted as "that is 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. Real change comes slowly and only comes to those who don't give up, who do search for how to care for and love people, and don't discount or despise the simplicity of the Good News as taught by Jesus in 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 supposedly need to be conformed to for there to be freedom. Freedom only comes from abiding in Jesus and He let's us know, when we are listening, what needs to be believed and practiced. No finite set of rules, principles, laws, or code 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 in a healthy way as you become aware of the limitations and benefits of the revealed truth, but the focus should always be on what Jesus is showing.

As with all books that talk about the possibility of good change, there is a warning with this one. When I have been set free by a truth and grace in an area that may have plagued me for

decades, the impulse has been often to carry the truth to an extreme, forget about grace, get proud, and start to judge and hurt people because of my twisted slant on things. Church history unfortunately has witnessed many clergy trying to “muzzle truths” that “seem dangerous” and “threatening” to them or the status quo. Whatever the place of shepherds in the church is, and they do have a place, if one can't embrace truth one embraces fear and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in my opinion. When I personally encounter a new truth I usually don't grasp all of its aspects or properties immediately and 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 just 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 structure to lose its power and to be dismantled.

The sin strongholds I speak about in this book made up an ugly structure erected in my heart for a very long time, and can fittingly be called “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within, and 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, guilt, and fears rooted in broken-relationship-wounds that negatively impact our relational lives.

The three-major-categories of sin: unhealthily seeking power, seeking sex, and seeking money characterize “the tree of knowledge of good and evil's” building blocks of “resentments, fear and pride”, its branches of “lust, sloth, and gluttony,” and its branches of “coveting judging and greed” respectively, and are commonly revealed to us in 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 busy growing this hideous tree structure within themselves as those outside of the church. We are all fallen.

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” within consists of a dark energy flowing and giving life to a connected structure that is comprised of the building blocks of resentments, fears, pride, coveting, judgmentalism, greed, lust, sloth, and gluttony and many other hideous attitudes and bad fruit. It needs to be dismantled for love to thrive.

Here is an overview of this book:

- Chapter one, Introduction.

- Chapter two, I give a description or outline 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.
- Chapter three, 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.
- Chapter four, I start to describe how I’ve learned to dismantle “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me, give what key Scriptures are used to drive the methodology, and give 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” which is intended to help us pray through them more thoroughly and help to dismantle them in the different contexts of our lives:
 - Chapter five, 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’s” life deceptively comes from.
 - Chapter six, 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 get the tree to grow wildly.
 - Chapter seven, 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 get this tree to grow wildly.
 - Chapter eight, I explain how I kill my lust and the related vices of sloth and gluttony from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” and how to grow healthy habits instead.
 - Chapter nine, I explain how to kill my coveting, envy, jealousy and related vices such as judging, anger, addictions, moral policing, greed, and selfishness from the “tree of knowledge on good and evil” and how to grow kindness and generosity instead.
 - Chapter ten, I summarize what was discussed in the previous chapters and deal with some trouble shooting tips when I get stuck.
 - Chapter eleven, I give five successful personal examples of how to work and pray so certain parts of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” are dismantled within me.
 - Chapter twelve, 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 through His Son: Jesus.
 - Chapter thirteen, Conclusion.

There are many graphic and coarse examples of strongholds found in this book. They are brutal, ugly, selfish, proud, arrogant, hostile, mean, hurtful, and often angry. And, they are mine, seeded through unhealthy beliefs that grew in time only to find their way into my subconscious

as I foolishly tried to suppress the baggage and not healthily process any of it.

Whenever I believed a devil's lie about myself and the people I knew in many contexts over the years of being hurt, a huge mess resulted in my interior and relational life. I landed up stuffing the bad energy that came from inside of me and I kept believing the devil's lies for years because I really didn't know how to wash away what was inside of me, even though I didn't want this bad energy in my life. I was just too blind on 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 keys 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 caution:

- 1) I did not find any healing when I isolated myself and put my own needs selfishly before others. The parable of the Good Samaritan 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 loving people through 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, and not waiting till I'm healthy enough, or until it is easier to love is the path to growing in love. Seeing the difficulties and obstacles as my place, my work bench, and my classroom to learn to love is wise!
- 2) I don't produce good fruit, but I bear it to use the True-Vine analogy from John 15. All the virtues, goodness, love, compassion, mercy, and grace that comes out of me is a result of the Holy Spirit. He performs His work through me. I am an instrument God uses. God told me that He was digging tunnels of love within me a long time ago, that means that 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

Admitting that I am God's instrument is what honest pride acknowledges. It concedes that God is the Author, Mastermind, Life-giver, and Peace-Giver that is responsible for whatever good comes out of me. When Paul says that "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) Focusing primarily on Jesus' presence, grace, and secondarily on little "t"-truths brings the most stability in navigating life's obstacles to love because they keep me from using anger and self-pity for selfish reasons.
- 4) I realized that I can't assume that doing things that require effort will always become

² Galatians 2:20

easy through prayers, and that by coasting through life I can do God's will. Going by my feelings (to feel good alone) in this context is never a good idea when it comes to living my life healthily, practicing self-control, doing acts of love, and working in a useful manner. If I do abandon effort, initiative, and caring and instead coast (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" helps to strengthen this tree's domination over our relationships.

All sin strongholds are very 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 behind them that I had incorporated into my life- thinking- belief- personality- character- and action-structure within. I couldn't take giant leaps to maturity over night: "Rome was not built in a day". Rather I realized that each lesson needs to be fully mastered, savored, understood, and put into practice by me for progress to be made so that eventually what Saint Paul said:

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.³

comes true in my life. "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."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 crudely, meanly, angrily, in self-pity, and be demanded...this all needs to be jettisoned, and the valid concerns still need to be embraced but with gentleness, respect, kindness, honor, peace, and acceptance that 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 meanly, judgmentally, proudly intolerantly go about developing and carrying out our cause. This needs to be repented from.

One might notice that in starting to read this book, that you may begin to feel more judgmental in some ways. If this is the case, then the book is triggering in you 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, eventually what is in you that gets triggered will be washed away 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 for

³ 1 Corinthians 13:11

⁴ This thought comes from my friend Mark Munn

your reward is very great.

The book of James in chapter 3, says, and I paraphrase: “where the tongue goes, the body follows suit.” I'm pained at just how true this has been in my life about negative stuff. When I seek to control situations or people I use my tongue. By the tongue, I judge what is pleasurable, and by the tongue I hurt people. It will be shown that "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within me is heavily influenced by how I use my tongue. Lies spring from my tongue, and lies did cause this tree to grow stronger and more twisted within me over time; and helped me to become more hurtful in how I related to 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, desires, and commitments; and I often land up believing what I carelessly speak.

It is fitting then, that through the tongue in prayer, this unhealthy “tree of knowledge of good and evil” structure within can be dismantled with God's help.

