

# **POVERTY STRONGHOLDS**



“We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.” Psalm 66:12

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## 1. Poverty Strongholds – Introduction

We were more than halfway through our ministry trip in Uganda. We had been alongside many, many pastors, had stayed in many homes, and had been to many districts and villages and churches.

So far, we had been experiencing a bounty of thought and action, of hospitality and sufficiency. Those we were alongside knew that God was caring for them, knew that life was good albeit hard, and out of that delighted in their care of us.

But then we ran across some thinking and perspectives that glared out at us as a poverty mindset extraordinaire all rolled into one. They claimed poverty as their biggest challenge and relayed to us stories of how the enemy was confounding everyone, literally everyone, in that surrounding area.

Now, we had heard bits and pieces of this same thinking in the months prior, but somehow it all came together in stark reality — all poverty was blamed on the devil; it was ALL satan's fault.

Now, while we know that satan's plan is one of destruction we could not abide by the belief that everything bad and wrong was of the enemy without any responsibility from the humans involved. If this were the case, then we would all be victims forever more, the end.

And so we jotted out our observations from our times and places within Uganda, the apparent thinking about poverty alongside the practical realities we had been seeing, coupled with our previous knowledge about leadership and theology. The image (on the next page) is a snapshot of our doodling and initial response to the victim and poverty mindsets in our midst.

We kept demonic interference as one of the evident strongholds of poverty for our initial goal was to point out that while satan and demons do play a part, that, in fact, satan is only one voice at the table, there are many other contributing factors to poverty. For instance:

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses

NOTE: As we continue with this conversation, we realize that we are not addressing pervasive injustice, corruption and world-wide systems that perpetuate and lock poverty into place for many nations worldwide. We understand that poverty is much more complex than what any one or two of us can do about it. Yet, within that context, our purpose is to empower the thinking of those caught by poverty and to point to practical shifts that would make a difference in their day to day lives, and that would lessen the 'voice' of poverty over their realities. Let's take a look at each of these eight things.



The answer is to take 100% responsibility for our lives and where we have gotten to at this point in time. Every time we excuse or blame we forfeit our personal power.

Note: may be legit reasons but where we use these to excuse our own behaviour or choices we lose power over our own lives.

- ✦ Galatians 6:4-5
- ✦ 2 Corinthians 5:10

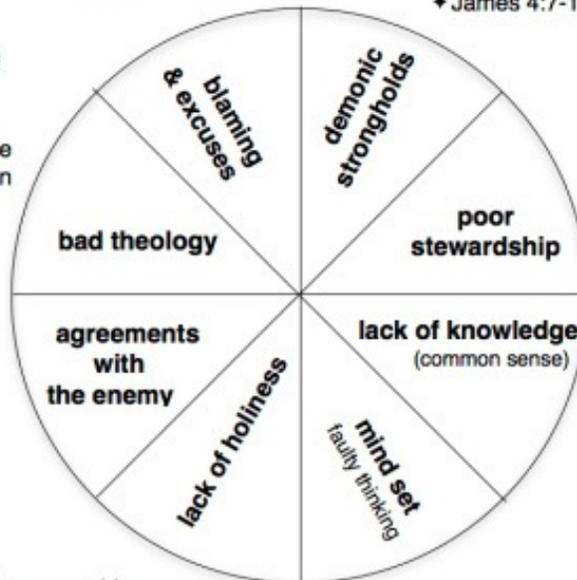
## Poverty Strongholds

Demons only have power by authority and permission given to them by our sin and our agreements with the enemy - we must deal with our heart sins first; i.e. bring in the light and darkness flees

- ✦ 2 Corinthians 10:4-6
- ✦ James 4:7-10

Where we distort the word of God for our own gain: e.g. where we manipulate blessings, use faith as excuse for lack of action, blame satan for everything, etc

- ✦ 2 Timothy 4:3-4
- ✦ Colossians 1:9-10



We must be faithful with a little or the little we have will be taken from us - we must take care of what we already have if we expect to be entrusted with more.

- ✦ Matthew 25:23
- ✦ Luke 16:10

Poverty is merely one of the symptoms that show there are many agreements with the enemy - usually lies regarding God's care for us

- ✦ 1 Timothy 6:3-10
- ✦ Galatians 6:7

Faith over applied - where we claim Jesus but do not do the practical requirements, and where we presume on the goodness of God. This shows up in money management, health, and decision making.

- ✦ 1 Samuel 15:22-24
- ✦ Proverbs 3:21-26

Habits of sin take us outside the covering of the Lord: i.e. lust, worry, promiscuity, envy, hatred, greed, idolatries, debt, lying, etc.

- ✦ 1 Corinthians 6:8-10
- ✦ James 1:15

Faulty thinking shows up in a myriad of ways:

- layers of denial, optimistic without seeing reality
- superstitious thinking and beliefs
- rushing to conclusions
- stuck on letter of the law without the spirit of the law
- little innovation, stuck on how it's always done
- assuming bigger is better

- ✦ Romans 12:2
- ✦ 2 Timothy 3:1-9

## **1. Demons**

To be sure there are satanic strongholds of poverty over whole areas and over individual lives. Satan hates people and has been working unto destruction of the entire human race ever since the beginning of time. To stand in the spirit realm with the authority to bring down these demonic strongholds unto poverty requires people who are ready, personally, corporately, and within a leadership role to take responsibility for these things and to usher, in place of poverty, the light of God. This is a huge job, not to be taken lightly or rushed into by any means. The authority to do this comes from the work that Jesus did on the cross and also by our personal diligence in overcoming each of the other elements of poverty strongholds. When people live the truth of God's sufficiency in their lives and communities, demonic strongholds automatically lose their power bit by bit until one day the last tentacles of Satan's hold can be declared gone.

## **2. Poor Stewardship**

This is an obvious one. How many of us have been neglectful of what we have but simultaneously long and lust for more? I have. It became apparent to us, in the three places where poverty mindset was most strong, that even what people had was not being taken care of. The Bible is not speaking flippantly when it says that he who is faithful with a little will be entrusted with much — we've seen the other side, those who are not caring for what they already have and then wondering why they don't have more. We must keep diligent and become focussed on caring for what we have already been entrusted with. This means that we do not despise the little that we have but that we care about these things as though they are much.

## **3. Lack of Knowledge**

I've described this lack of knowledge as faith over-applied. We saw this again and again, where people are just waiting on God to do something, or they are heading forward in creating projects way beyond their means, presuming on God's goodness to cover over their poor decisions. A lack of knowledge has us over-emphasizing faith but refusing to practice practical and wise choices. Some of this is because there is in fact a lack of knowledge — for instance, many may not know that keeping a child cold and naked when they are sick is only going to make the child sicker. Coupled alongside this is the propensity to make everything spiritual and to in fact blame the enemy for everything that goes wrong. Common sense is lost, faith is over-applied, and a lack of knowledge in many areas leaves people in poverty.

## **4. Faulty Thinking**

There is much that can be said about faulty thinking and its various impacts on life. One story — we met with a woman who wanted prayer. She was a mom of six children with the youngest at two years old. She was married to a muslim who had other wives, she had no home to live in, was living with her brother. I asked a lot of questions, both of her and the pastors that we were alongside, to come to understand the thinking of this woman. We have been alongside many just like her. With a husband who is no husband at all, with continued children arriving and my question is, "Why does she keep sleeping with this man?" The explanation in response to my inquiry was that women have a lot of hope. This I understand. But I also know that this is denial and an inability to see reality for what it is. This too, contributes to habitual poverty.

## **5. Lack of Holiness**

When we are outside of the plan of God we open ourselves to the bad fruit of our habits and thinking. If we are promiscuous we will find ourselves with ramifications that lead to death, so to speak, in our lives. If we are judgmental of others we will reap those same judgments. If we are chronic liars we will break trust in all our business dealings and ultimately go out of business. Etc. Our actions matter, our attitudes towards others matter, our choices matter. The way we choose to live, the kind of people we choose to be, makes a difference in how our lives will become. So, where we are determined to live our own way, we will end up in lifestyles and manner of being that undermine all that we really want.

## **6. Agreements With the Enemy**

As mentioned in our diagram, poverty is merely one of the bad fruit of our agreements with the enemy. And, agreements with the enemy could be the summarizing point of all the other poverty strongholds. For basically, wherever we have bad fruit in our lives, communities, or nations, we are seeing the result of agreements with satan. All through the Bible we see evidence of this principle. Where two or more agree that thing is done. This is true of agreements with God, and this is true in terms of agreements with the enemy. On one side of us we have all that God is saying unto life, godliness, a future and a hope and more, and on the other side of us we have all that satan is saying unto death, destruction, chaos, and more. And it is us who make the second witness; we decide whom we will listen to and agree with, and in our agreement we seal future movements and life. When we have agreed to the enemies lies and condemnations we will see poverty showing up on various ways throughout our life. Freedom, then, is coming to first of all recognize the agreements we have with satan, and then, systematically and intentionally confessing, repenting, and breaking those agreements, we make new ones unto the Lord; our lives are then given a chance to become new in the Lord.

## **7. Bad Theology**

There is, here also, many kinds of bad theology and the bad fruit that comes from them. But the one that we see most noticeably within the churches in Uganda is the manipulation and distortion of God's principles around money and giving. We have seen again and again tithing being used to put fear and guilt onto, often the poorest, of people. Here, the church is part of the system that is keeping people in poverty. When the church eats the poor person's meal in order to buy cars and houses for its pastors, there is systemic abuse. The poor themselves, are unaware that they are being abused and misused. Good theology of God's heart around giving and tithing must be taught; the people themselves must be empowered to say no to manipulative tactics that prey on their desperations. While there are other bad theologies that contribute to strongholds of poverty, this is one of the most blatant bad theology that participates in the poverty of others.

## **8. Blaming & Excusing**

There is a basic principle of leadership (not just for 'leaders' but for anyone who wants to take hold of their lives for the better) and it is this principle of refusing to blame or excuse. In essence, we are all given one-hundred percent power for our lives; we all are capable of moving our lives forward in some way. Yet, when we blame our circumstances, the systems around us, or other people, we cut out a slice of our power pie and essentially give away our power. When we make an excuse we become the victim and we make solid our inability to do anything about our situation. Refusing, then, to blame or to make excuse puts us into position to begin to find new solutions and opportunity; we take back the power to

move our lives forward bit by bit. This sounds fairly simple but the impact of simply refusing to speak blame or excuse any longer, had profound effects upon a person's life.

## **9. In Addition**

If my pie chart would easily add another piece I would add a #9. Refusing to Bless Others. It was pointed out to me by a Ugandan pastor that western nations have consistently positioned themselves to be a blessing to others and this is part of their prosperity. I have to agree with him. God is a generous God and when we follow in his lead we will also be generous. This is of course, a distinction from the bad theology that using giving as a way to get something in return. When we manipulate God's principle of generosity we do not find good fruit because our motives are wrong. But, when we become part of God's generosity and solutions for others, we will find ourselves open and in stream of his Kingdom in our lives.

## **10. Pain Upon Pain**

Finally, I would add one more stronghold of poverty, and that would be pain upon pain that is buried deep in a people and passed on to generations after generations. I initially came upon this on my fourth trip to Africa in the country of Mozambique. I had been to an amazing church and people for a few days and then moved locations, a mere twenty-minute bike ride away, where the tenor of the place was profoundly different. There was an oppression over the village unlike anything I have ever experienced before. At every moment there was a child sobbing — and worse, the adults and parents either ignored or mocked these sobbing children. At first I thought it was just very bad parenting, but then the Lord revealed to me that, “No Cyndy, this is pain upon pain.” Of course! I know about pain upon pain and it is part of my job to remove and cut through strongholds of pain in people's lives and communities.

What was so interesting in this place was that the homes were the same, everyone was dressed the same as elsewhere in the country, there was plenty of food, all the outward elements required for safety, shelter, and food was in place and yet, this village had a profound spirit of poverty pervading the place. The homes were dirtier, the children neglected, the teens mocked the elderly women (shocking for me to see this in Africa — it was then I knew something was very wrong in that place), and the eyes of the people carried profound sadness. It was, I recognized, the first time I had come across poverty in all my travels within Africa. And so, when we consider strongholds of poverty I cannot leave out realities of pain upon pain. This, from what I have seen, creates the most crippling poverty of all.

## **In Conclusion**

All of these poverty strongholds are what happen when good leadership principles are ignored, when personal responsibility is given over, when theology is filtered through our own best knowledge (it just never comes out right), when greed and lust and sins of the heart are allowed unchecked, and when people as individuals and corporately agree to the lies and accusations of the enemy.

And while it may sound harsh to say to the poor, “You are part of your own problem.” it is in fact only as we acknowledge our participation that we can then do something about it all — if we have a responsibility for what has gone wrong we can then take on responsibility to begin making it right! We all have the ability to respond and live differently than we currently are. This is not a judgment or a condemnation but this is an opportunity to be changing things. It begins with us.

My next post will be Poverty Strongholds — Part Two, where I will outline more of the solutions and shifts we make within ourselves, to proactively conclude our participation with these strongholds; we can respond, even within a context of poverty, in a manner of being that will indeed lessen the ‘voice’ of poverty in our lives.

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## 2. Poverty Strongholds – The Authority By Which I Speak

**In Part One of this topic** I barely scratched the surface of the intricacies and poverty mindsets as many of us observe them, and/or live them out. There is so much that can be delineated within each of the ten strongholds as I am describing them. But let me continue on in this series with a bit about myself. I speak into this issue of poverty strongholds not from a place of observation or as an outsider, but I speak from a place of, “I’ve lived through these very same things”. I’ve intimately known the mindsets of poverty and the bad fruit that was piling up as a result.

For instance, there was a time in my history where I was continuing in bad relationship with ‘hope’ that refused to look at reality. There was a time when there was very little provision or food and I was starving myself so that my children could eat. There was a time when the money I did have seemed to be consistently and always disappearing as though my ‘bucket’ had a giant hole. And for years I carried accumulated pain upon pain (heart pain) that nearly stole my life in chronic autoimmune diseases. I’ve know what it is to be in despair and to be buried in pain that overwhelmed me in both good thinking and in energy required to rise above the current circumstances.

I’ve personally known the strongholds of poverty and, thankfully the Lord has taken me in hand for more than a decade to bring my thinking in line with the Kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of satan, and this has made all the difference in the world to me and for my life.

So, when I travel to developing nations and as I am in village after village, and in many, many churches hearing the thoughts of the people, listening to sermons that give me a glimpse into the belief systems, and as I experience the difference in hospitality from those who are living God’s sufficiency to those who are living with poverty thinking, I cannot help but discern the roots and the bad fruit and the dots connecting the two. I recognize faulty theology and mindsets that keep us down.

Because of my life experiences I can spot poverty thinking, I can spot abusive people (and every type of abuse), I can spot abused people, I can spot dysfunctional marriages, mental illness, learning disabilities, and I can spot spiritual abuse. I easily spot habits of denial and coping mechanisms, I spot addictive behaviours and drug and alcohol abuse, and I can spot sexual addictions, and those who have been molested. I can spot faith over-applied and when people are avoiding grief. All of these things I have lived alongside and many of these things I myself once was.

So, again, I come to this topic of poverty from a ‘been there done that’ perspective. I’ve been stuck in my life with little to no understanding of how to move forward or beyond. I’ve been in seasons of great ‘hope’ that ultimately turned out to be great denial. And even to this day I’ve still a natural tendency to over-apply faith and to disregard the practical steps required for whole and healthy living; it is one of my weaknesses that I am constantly aware of and trying to balance out.

I am also well aware of the demonic and the strongholds in the spirit realm that seek to undo us. My spiritual gifting can spot the demonic in people and places. My senses can identify what is going on in the unseen realm, and I have the wisdom to address these things. If I am in your home and there is a demon in your house I will know it. In your speaking I can tell when it is you talking and when it is another thing

voicing its opinion. Creepy, I know, but just a part of how I take in the world. I say this because here I too could just as easily (theoretically) blame everything on the enemy as the many we know who do this. I could bring up these spiritual realities as THE forces that are keeping us stuck, but of course that would be only a small portion of the story.

For, as a coach and someone who has worked in leadership development for some years, and within all of my experiences of being stuck and struck down and even oppressed, I know these are in our realm to stand firmly against, to make different choices, to bit by bit (often profoundly slowly), shift our thinking and our actions so that life ceases to become smaller and instead opens up into something we never imagined possible. This I know.

It is from this rich experience of being neglected, abused, shamed, stuck, demoralized, broken, and burrowed deep into poverty mindsets, that I have seen and known and am still experiencing, the way out. It is from this place, this brokenness and then restored into wholeness, that I write back into those still stuck in poverty mindsets – there is a way out of the chronic thinking that gives too much power to the things that would keep us down.

It is this, in a nutshell, we must, ***“destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:5***

The conclusions we’ve made about life determine much of our futures. As a prayer minister who facilitates inner healing and deliverance, I work with individuals in a process of hearing the Lord, of receiving the revelation of the Holy Spirit and of becoming privy to the secrets of our hearts, so that there might be confession, healing, and freedom from our belief systems that do not line up with the knowledge of God.

For instance, one of my prayer clients came from an exceptionally abusive home as a child. Now, when bad things happen to us as children, we don’t have any way to process these things. Our logic is still in development, we are very ego driven when we are young, which is just another way of saying that anything that happens we think it is about us, by us, because of us, for us, etc. When we are young we do not have the capacity to stand back and see things from a detached perspective; everything is profoundly personal.

And the enemy takes advantage of this. Something goes wrong in our lives and it is as though satan whispers a lie into our heart and mind. For the person coming out of profound abuse there would be conclusions (agreements made with these lies) in the form of beliefs such as, “God is not taking care of me, I must take care of myself.” Or, “No one cares.” Or, “I will always be alone in my problems.” And more.

Now, these ‘conclusions’ about life, God, others, or ourselves, are buried very deeply in our inner person. They are the secrets of the heart that the Bible speaks of and of which we cannot become aware without the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit. But once we are aware of them, we can, now as adults come to a change of mind.

***“Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.”***

***1 Corinthians 4:5***

***“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” 1 Corinthians 13:11***

Now, as adults, we capture the thought, “I will always be alone” and we bring it into obedience to Christ, which is nothing more than bringing that thought out of agreement with the lie, and into agreement with what God says, ***“I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20***

*“God I confess that I have believed that I will always be alone. But I realize that this goes directly against what your word says and what you have promised. So, today, in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, I renounce and I say ‘No More!’ to this lie of my heart and mind that ‘I will always be alone’. In the power of the Lord Jesus Christ I reach back into my past and wherever this lie first took root in my heart and mind I uproot it, leaving nothing behind, unwinding this lie from around my heart, mind, body, and spirit and declaring that all assignments, curses, or authority of the enemy (that has been allowed and invited even, to work in my life because of this lie) are cancelled today in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. Today, I take on your truth God, that you are with me even to the end of the age. I press this truth of your presence throughout my entire being and life and I invite you to show me anew each and every day yourself. Restore me Lord. Thank you. Amen”*

And we do this with every single thought, belief, and mindset! Systematically, intentionally, deliberately, item by item we work through the lies that live in the recesses of our hearts and we bring them to the cross of Christ where we find freedom and transformation and a personal revival of our souls and lives.

This process of taking our thoughts captive ([you can find more about this healing prayer process HERE](#)) is the foundation of all transformation in Christ and this is especially true of the mindsets of poverty that we find in every society and culture worldwide.

You see, we wonder, is poverty a ‘thing’ out there that is against us, holding us hostage, pushing us back at all times? Well, yes and no.

Yes of course poverty is outside of us and against many. At the same time, when we take poverty thinking into our minds and hearts we strengthen it, we solidify it, we give it way more power in our lives than it was ever meant to have. Poverty may be outside and against us but when we agree with it and its lies, we make it a part of ourselves and we begin to do its work for it, and against us.

We create the second witness. Who are we agreeing with, the enemy and his assignments and conclusions about you, or are we agreeing with God and what he is saying about himself and how we fit into him and his good things for our lives? What we are believing makes all the difference in the world. And so, we *must take our responses* to these very bad things very seriously. We take responsibility for our conclusions that do not line up with who God is and what he says in his word. Here, as we take responsibility, we are ushered out of victimization and into new ways of seeing and experiencing the world and new ways of going forward.

In our thoughts and beliefs and in the secret places of our hearts we, **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7**

The lenses, the blinders that have been over our understanding are removed. We see clearer, we find solutions easier and we move into new things in the Lord; in this, in Him, we lessen the voice of poverty over our lives.

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### 3. Poverty Strongholds – Poor Stewardship

1. Demons
2. **Poor Stewardship**
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy

7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
10. Pain Upon Pain

Walking through these poverty strongholds we will begin with our second stronghold, Poor Stewardship. I'll write a post on each of these separately, for I am realizing the depth of the material to explore.

### **Let's Begin: Poor Stewardship**

Poor Stewardship refers to the basic principle of being faithful with a little. From my own experience and observations this 'faithful with a little' is either a character strength or a character flaw. We either take care of the things entrusted to us or we do not.

The ability to be faithful with a little has nothing to do with what the little is or is not. Rather, a person either respects and values and takes care of what is being offered, what is right there, what has already been entrusted, or he or she does not.

When we lack forward movement in our lives it is wise to think about our current possessions, our current relationships, our current responsibilities and to ascertain if we are in fact doing all we are to be doing, within the context of these things.

Are we being responsible with what we've already been given? For the person unable to do this, their eyes and focus is on the next thing to come, the next shiny object so to speak. Unable, or unwilling, to focus on the present the person is living in the future. Their sight is on that perceived spot down the road yet they are not seeing the needs and responsibilities all around them.

Often, poor stewardship at its heart is a lack of gratitude; now is not sufficient, now is not enough, not right, and so we disdain the now. Poor stewardship is a bad attitude about the things we have; we do not take care of what we already have. We become flippant with the little and a bad habit is borne in our hearts.

To change our habits in stewardship we must make an intention to take care of what we already have. We must take our eyes and our longing off of the future and settle into what is now. This will take some time and much focus for we are retraining our thinking and actions.

And not only are we retraining ourselves, but we are establishing our faithfulness. And this takes even longer. I won't lie to you. Becoming faithful in a little (when we have not been) is a lot of very hard work with the time required to establish faithfulness well past anything we might imagine.

There will be a testing. Will you remain faithful in a little even when it appears that there is nothing in it for you?

This is not just about caring for the things already entrusted to us, it is about the breaking down of our heart's irresponsibilities and all of its bad motives and it is then a building up of a right heart towards life and what God has entrusted to us.

When I come across poverty mindsets it is always accompanied by this lack of caring for what has already been entrusted. The person may have a bike but does not care for the bike. A person may have a home and yet it is not kept clean or tidy. A family may have a garden and yet it is not utilized to its fullest, much of it is without produce.

1. The very first step to come out of poor stewardship is to confess this sin to the Lord. Recognize your full sin and the losses that you have established by your lack of faithfulness to the little. Then, tell the Lord about this. And ask for His help.

*“God I come before you today in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ and I confess that I have not been faithful in a little, I have not been caring for what you have already been giving me, and I have been blaming you for this part of my life that has gone wrong. I am sorry. Today I say ‘No more’ to poor stewardship and I ask you to change my heart and mind and my life. Help me to become a good steward of everything you have entrusted to me. Amen”*

2. Next, make a list of the things in which you want to be faithful. In your relationships, who do you need to be caring for? Are you children clothed and bathed and fed? What about your home — are there repairs that need to be made, is it clean, what little thing might you do today to be faithful in the care of your home?

In terms of money, do you owe money to anyone? What is your plan for paying that back? How about your ministry and the projects you have already begun — do not plan or think about further ministry projects until these ones are established and solid and self-sustaining. Work through your plans to a successful conclusion, do not leave projects half done.

Some things will take many small steps to make them right and to prove your faithfulness and your stewardship. If you realize that you have overstepped what you are able to do, maybe it is time to downsize and to simplify so that you might be successful with a smaller amount.

Know that you may be working at being faithful with a little for some time, years even. The longer you have been unfaithful with a little, the longer you have been a poor steward, the longer it will take to reestablish yourself and faithful.

Yet, enter into this for the long haul. Your life depends on it. There are no quick fixes yet a life established on faithfulness, particularly in the little things, will give birth to small steady increases throughout the years. This is the kind of person you want to be. Focus on the little, take care of it well, and by and by you will find yourself responsible for more, faithful with more.

***“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”  
1 Peter 4:20***

***“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?” Luke 16:10-11***

***“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,” Colossians 3:23***

***“Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man’s dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.”  
Proverbs 21:10***

***“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.” Matthew 10:8***

***“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” 1 Corinthians 4:2***

***“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” Matthew 25:23***

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#### 4. Poverty Strongholds – Lack of Knowledge

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship – link to past article
3. **Lack of Knowledge (common sense)**
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
10. Pain Upon Pain

Today we explore a lack of knowledge, where common sense is missing, and where as a result faith is over-applied.

When I was working in the professional development field one of my colleagues would always comment on how people are meaning-making machines. His observation was that something would happen and that people, by and large, would rush to ascribe meaning to it, to try and make sense of what happened.

And of course, he is right. As humans we do rush to make meaning of everything around us. We see this and that and we surmise and ponder and speak our conclusions. And while this is very normal and very human of us, we often run into problems and conclusions made too soon.

We may, in our hunger for meaning, come to conclusions that are false and that do damage. When we make up meaning, or speak out of our own best understanding, we will be carriers of falsehood and misinformation.

Within the Christian community (but most likely within all religion) we do this with bonus faith-speak thrown in — we often over-apply faith to help us make sense of what is going on around us. But faith was never meant to be part of our denial or part of our coping mechanism for what we cannot understand, (rather, faith is for action in response to the initiatives of God).

Now, I cannot solve all lack of knowledge problems with this day's post. Lack of knowledge as a poverty stronghold is pervasive and exceptionally unfortunate. When we do not know something — we do not know something. We are stuck in our lack of knowledge.

For instance, I was recently in Uganda and one of the homes in which I stayed had a little girl about four years old who was quite sick. Our first few nights we heard her coughing and struggling to breath and to sleep. It wasn't until the third night that I finally identified her particular struggles as croup (my own children had croup a number of times but it has been over twenty years since).

I immediately got up out of bed and went and told her grandma that she was struggling with croup. I briefly explained the illness and I told her to get some hot water and to make a steam tent over her, to do this for the nights necessary (usually only a few nights and she would be fine). She did this and within half an hour the little girl was able to sleep just fine.

Now, this was a classic case of a lack of knowledge. The grandma told me that the little girl was 'coughing' but of course I could hear the distinction and that she was actually 'gasping for breath'. A small but very important difference.

In addition to croup, when I went to the grandma's room to give the solution the little girl was without any clothes on in a chilly home, and of course, coming from the west I know that if we are sick we need to be kept warm and dressed in layers so that our bodies can focus on fighting the illness (as opposed to trying to keep warm). Two pieces of knowledge that they did not have.

These two pieces of knowledge literally could have meant the difference between life and death for this little girl, (by the time we said goodbye to these folks the little girl was well on her way to recovery).

The gaps in knowledge from the west to developing nations are huge and show up in these ways. I can easily see that without these two pieces of knowledge, coupled with our human need to make meaning of all things, that we could make all sorts of reasons why (if the child had died for instance).

We may claim, "God determined that her time was done and wanted her home." (faulty blame of God's omnipotence) or, "Satan came and took her life." (faulty blame of everything as Satan's fault), or any number of other 'rationale's that would help explain and give some meaning. When in actual fact (if the girl had died) she would have died from being too cold and from not being able to breath. Not very glamorous and in fact heartbreaking.

In another case, just two days before I flew home, there was a young couple whose first-born son of about two months old died of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome). I saw them the day after, less than twenty-four hours since they had put him in the ground. I held the mother as she wept and told them the best I could that it was okay to grieve and to cry and to be mad and to be sad.

This is not the normal advice given in Uganda — usually within the Christian community people are told to be strong and have faith, (and the pastor I was with literally told them this ... one day after putting their baby in the ground... ).

Here again is a lack of knowledge. From the west we know that grieving is a very specific process and that as humans we must give ourselves time and space to grieve well. We know that the five stages of grief are 1. Denial, 2. Anger, 3. Bargaining, 4. Depression, and 5. Acceptance. We know that each of these stages must be experienced and felt and allowed if we want to go on to live emotionally, spiritually, and physically strong futures. We know that it is not a 'lack of faith' to be angry with God. In fact, just the opposite.

On the ten-day mark since this little baby's death I asked a mutual friend how they were doing. His reply, "They are going forward strong in the Lord." ...

I wanted to push a giant buzzer and yell, "Wrong Answer!" This is the wrong answer. If they are strong in the Lord and going forward just 10 days since their baby died, something is very wrong.

Now, as I said, bridging this lack of knowledge is a long slow process dependant on people bringing education and awareness in these matters. When people are missing important pieces of information it is not their fault per se that they don't have the information. They are doing what they can with what they have and what more can be expected of them? Truly.

What can be done, though, is that this habit, this addiction almost, to make meaning of things, can be held back; we can learn to wait and to not rush to ascribe meaning. We can learn to become okay with ambiguity and not knowing the answers.

And when we are okay with ambiguity and with not knowing, we won't be prone to explaining everything in an over-faith kind of way. We may not know the knowledge that we need to know but we don't have to rush to fill this space with god-speak.

This requires that we hold our ground, remaining steady, even when we have no answers and we cannot see what is what. This is better than rushing to fill the space with explanations that are not explanations at all.

For once we are practiced (in refusing to give random meaning) then our minds and hearts are in fact open to hearing from the Lord and to the knowledge and understanding of things that we would not have previously thought of or considered.

From a coaching perspective we know that once we have rushed to an answer, our minds shut down to any further information or understanding and in many cases, we then remain in our ignorance and are unable to hear other considerations.

The pastors, around this young couple who just lost their baby boy, are solid in their knowledge that the only way to get past this death is to be strong and have faith. They are virtually impervious to any other considerations or options or ways of grappling with the loss — because they have made up their minds and are firm in their conclusions, because they have filled in the unknown (death will always bring us up against all that doesn't make sense to us) with god-speak they are, unknowingly, doing damage to this young couple.

When we minister to people in their most vulnerable times with god-speak that sounds like faith (but isn't) we shut down all potential for increased knowledge and understanding. Our minds, once firm in their conclusions, are closed off from further learning or wisdom. Stuck in this habit of response we often give people only one option, and in our god-speak we may even claim that anything outside of that option is a lack of faith, (adding spiritual abuse to those already brought low by life's circumstances).

The only thing worse than a lack of knowledge is being shut down to further knowledge. For if we are shut down to further knowledge, *the knowledge may be there*, but we will be impervious to it, unable to accept it, to receive it, and to have our understanding broadened. This would be a true tragedy.

In summary, the first step to greater knowledge and understanding is learning to hold ambiguity well. We want to be strong enough people that we do not have to rush to conclusions. We don't want to misapply faith when critical knowledge is missing. We want to be people who do not rush to god-speak as a way of coping with life. We want to in fact be open to new knowledge and the things we may not yet know by which life would improve.

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#### Poverty Strongholds #5 – Mind Sets (faulty thinking)

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship – link to past article
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. **Mind Sets (faulty thinking)**
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing

## 10. Pain Upon Pain

Today we look at Mind Sets, or faulty thinking and how the way we think may be keeping us locked into cycles of poverty.

### **On the Poverty Strongholds graphic I have faulty thinking noted as:**

- layers of denial, optimistic without seeing reality
- superstitious thinking and beliefs
- rushing to conclusions (already addressed in Lack of Knowledge)
- stuck on letter of the law without the spirit of the law
- little innovation, stuck on how it's always done
- assuming bigger is better

In brief I will add some understanding to each one of these.

### **Layers of Denial:**

Layers of denial are habits of thought that keep us protected from bad news and from grief but also keep us from clarity and reasoning that can move us forward. Like the woman I mentioned in [my first post under faulty thinking](#), she is protecting herself from the raw knowledge that she married a man that does not love her. He is refusing to care and commit to her, is using her for sex (unprotected sex even, as more children are added to compound her poverty), and meanwhile she continues in a habit of thought that continues to hold out hope.

Where we are not strong enough to see reality for what it is, we form denial as protection, and yet denial is a cesspool of falsehoods and reasonings that are not looking at things as they are but as we want them to be. Habits of denial keep us from making decisions that would move us forward. If this woman were to admit (to herself first and foremost) that her 'husband' is *not* interested in her or does not truly love her, she would be free to make new decisions on behalf of herself and her children.

What we have found though is that for a woman to make choices to remove herself and her children from negative and unhealthy relationships, that woman must have a strong support base around her, she must have community that supports her best future. This is what the church should be for her or for anyone in a vulnerable situation. We must, as the body of Christ ask, "How can we support this woman (emotionally, spiritually, financially) so that she can make good choices for herself and her children?"

Only in good supportive communities are we able to take down the layers of denial that cloud our reasoning and hold us locked into unhealthy patterns.

### **Superstitious Thinking and Beliefs:**

I was once praying for an elderly Indian man who was struggling with chronic health problems and a pervasive inability to believe God as good. As I was praying for him I realized that he might have something that he was holding between himself and the Lord, and so I asked him if there was anything that he held as a regret. He answered, "Yes, the time that I killed all the mice and the rats, I think they are coming back to punish me."

What was I to do with that?! His thinking was clearly from animism, where the 'gods' must be appeased and placated and where we are at the mercy (or non-mercy) of the natural world. In this man's thinking his illness was due to the rats and mice punishing him and he, on his part, was surrendered to this belief; in his mind there was nothing that could be done about this or about his present state of heart, mind, or body, (because the rats and mice were gods and had determined his fate).

Similarly, in Thai thinking it is considered bad to improve one's life. This belief, which is hard-wired into the culture, leaves people with a conflict, improve your life but become bad and wrong, or, just take life as it comes but without any say. This belief system leaves people in poverty. In essence you are a better person if you just take life as it comes to you, (but life won't become anything new or better, ever).

Superstitious thinking is built on fear and a desire to control people. In the west we call these old-wives tales and find them coming from silly things that were once said to children (by control and with fear) to bring out a good result. For instance, one superstition I learned about while in Uganda is this: "If you peep at someone in a toilet your mother will give birth to a snake".

Obviously the goal is to keep children from the habit of peeping at someone while they are in the toilet, but the fear that this breeds in the brains wiring and in the heart of the child remain with bad impact. And there are multitudes of superstitious thinking between these two examples of 'do not peep' ,on one end of the scale to, 'the rats and mice will in fact get you' on the other end.

(NOTE: At the heart of all superstitious thinking is fear, and this is what must be identified as the bad guy. We must refuse fear. We don't use it to control others and we will not be controlled by it ourselves.)

### **Stuck on Letter of the Law, without the Spirit of the Law:**

The letter of the law is a death thing; without the heart of intention behind any law, we see only in black and white and without depth of understanding. When we take any one commandment or injunction in a harsh taskmaster kind of way, without paying attention to the heart of our King or the hearts of the people around us, we see and act in one dimension.

Opposite to this, doing life within the spirit of the law opens up our hearts and minds, and our lives and relationships. The most prevalent example of being stuck on the letter of the law without the spirit of the law is found in our habits and thoughts around tithing.

Without the spirit of the law we end up in excess and exaggeration. For instance, and in regards to tithing (a very volatile topic I know):

- The spirit of the law says 'live a life that trusts in the Lord'
- The letter of the law says 'you must tithe 10%
- The letter of the law says 'you give to god and he will take care of you'
- The spirit of the law says 'god is taking care of you, out of that live generously'
- The letter of the law says 'a tithe must be 10%'
- The spirit of the law says 'give your life away, the tithe is only a starting point'

Were we to delve fully into the conversation around tithing we would find much more, but of course that is not our purpose today, I use this only to show the difference in mind-set between a letter of the law perspective versus what we know when we understand within the spirit of the law.

We want to be people who walk in the spirit of our Lord. We don't want to remain stuck in the letter of the law. The spirit of the law brings life but the letter of the law brings death. (verse) Our thinking must reflect the wisdom and spirit of our Lord if we are to find health and wholeness and the Kingdom of God come to earth in our present realities.

In another example of the letter of the law gone bad was in a church where I once ministered in Uganda. They had a situation of a young teen girl who was taken out of her family due to the husband and wife having a bad time of things. The husband and wife were fighting often and long and were on the verge of divorce. The cause of their fighting was considered to be their daughter. And so, because divorce is bad (note, letter of the law) the girl was removed from her home and from her parents. And she was put into a foster home (of which 90% of them were abusive and neglectful by their own admission), so that the couple would remain married.

There is so much wrong with this thinking (and the action taken as a result), we see that it comes down to a focus on the letter of the law without understanding the spirit of our Lord. There was no consideration given to the growth and development or heart of the girl, only to the law that says 'divorce is bad'. Bigger thinking and understanding, and the solutions and support found there, was given over for small, narrow, rigid, responses, which in the end created more harm than good.

### **Little Innovation – Stuck on How it's Always Been Done:**

When we are stuck on doing things the 'right' way we leave little room for mistakes, and without room for mistakes or failure we will not innovate and we will not expand in our ability to respond and to make critical and relevant decisions regarding our lives.

In controlled cultures, where there is little freedom of thought or action, we limit innovation and without innovation nothing changes, we just remain the same. In the professional development arena we have an understanding that to get to where we need to be in a years time that we must change as people. In other words, we cannot get to a changed future without becoming a changed people.

It is wishful thinking, and false faith, to remain doing the same things expecting a different result. In fact, it has been said that the definition of insanity is just this – doing the same thing expecting a different result. If we want a different result we must do things differently.

I think back to the example of the woman with six children, married to a muslim man with many wives, and how she keeps being with this man, sleeping with him, bearing his children, expecting that somehow things are going to be different. Yet, if we look at life with clear understanding and frank observation, we will realize that this (the man waking up one day and all of a sudden loving and caring for his wife and children) rarely happens.

The woman, in order to have a change in her world and her circumstances, would need to begin making changes for herself; she would have to do the hard work of choosing something different within herself. This is the same no matter who we are or what we want out of life. If what we are doing right now, the choices we are making at this time, are producing inadequate results in our lives, then we must change the way we are doing life.

Of course, the difficulty of this is that many people around her would not understand and may even condemn, ridicule, chastise, and may even reject her. It therefore requires great personal strength but also a strength of community (around a person) in order for change to take place. It also requires diligence and a commitment to change, and a clarity of understanding that can stand the test of time that lasting change might take root.

I don't want to minimize the difficulty of this, it is profound, but it can be done. The primary principle to understand is that if we want a different future then we must begin living our life in a different kind of way right now, not all at once of course, but increasingly, as different people.

### **Assuming Bigger is Better:**

There is an assumption that bigger is better. I come across it all the time as I work with overseas cultures. Of course, it began in the west; for a few generations now we have been proponents of bigger and better. Thankfully, in the west we have been seeing the folly of this and have begun to change our definitions of success; more is not always better.

The problem with 'bigger is better' thinking is that it is assumed absolutely true in all circumstances, in all situations, and in all goals we might have. But of course, it isn't always true. In fact, in many situations smaller is better.

We are finding that to narrow our focus and to be about only one thing makes us better leaders and more effective influences; a person trying to do six different things will do those six things in a haphazard sloppy and ineffective sort of way.

It may look good and it may sound great to say 'I am doing ... and this ... and this ....' but to anyone who knows better this does not sound great but in fact hazards failure.

I see this most often in school projects in developing nations. An individual will take on the challenge and goal of establishing a school for his or her community. A board will be established, teachers will be secured, a location for the school will be found and education will begin for the children in that area. This is all very good of course and it is a privilege to work alongside individuals who are becoming part of the solution for their communities; this is exactly what it means to live out the heart of God within our countries.

Yet, where it goes wrong is this. The first year has, for instance, 120 students. The second year will have 190 students, and the third year finds 265 students attending the school. From a professional development perspective this is courting disaster; the biggest threat to any organization or business is too fast of growth!

Growth that happens this fast outpaces the available infrastructure. The structures for school are outgrown, the finances are not in place to pay for the additional teachers required, and the leadership is usually not personally mature or strong enough to keep at pace with the problems and demands that come with an education facility more than doubling in size in just a couple of years.

And yet, these numbers are shared as success, with much applaud and self-congratulations. The problem is this bigger is better mentality. The thinking is simply not accurate. When we go after big instead of stable, or self sufficient, or sustainable, we court disaster – we in fact invite failure. And this, is never the point.

Here, we need brave persons who will go after things well, establishing foundations and infrastructure and careful growth. We need brave persons who will put limits on their endeavours and have the courage to say 'no' when necessary, with an eye to long-term projects that will prove a success over many years.

### **In Conclusion:**

Our mind sets and the ways we interpret the world (whether rightly or wrongly) are the basis of every other part of our lives. Taking hold of our thinking and seeing the faults in our logic and belief systems is

integral to moving out of poverty mentalities. We want our thoughts working for us and not against us. If we remain diligent towards this end, bit by bit over time, our lives will reveal the change in our thinking. For much of it begins in our minds.

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## 6. Poverty Strongholds – Lack of Holiness

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship – link to past article
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. **Lack of Holiness**
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
10. Pain Upon Pain

### **Let's take a look at the next Poverty Stronghold – Lack of Holiness.**

By and large, within our christian communities, we do not seem to talk a lot about holiness and yet it is a critical piece of living within the Kingdom of God. It boils down to this: God is a holy God, and as He calls us He asks us to play the game (understand and know that the Kingdom is His and our participation requires we live by His rules) as he would have it played – this means that as God is holy we are called to be holy.

We cannot flaunt unholy living, or hide sins in secret, while claiming and wanting a relationship with him and it's impact and the influence that comes within the kingdom of God. To be in His kingdom means that we are abiding by the standards and parameters of that kingdom.

Now to be clear, holiness is not something we can attain on our own. Our justification is in the work of Jesus and so too, is our sanctification. It is on Jesus that we rest for our holiness. This is important and critical to get right. We do not and cannot make ourselves holy.

Having said that, we can though, interfere with, squander, and throw away our holiness. If we are not close-in to the presence of the Lord the cries of our flesh will take over. If we are not dead to our sin responses we may find them loud and strong. And if we do not remain purposed unto the holiness of our Lord we may become compromised in our faith-walk and our lives, (yes, all purposeful understatement).

To purposely meddle in unholy things will remove us from the covering of our Lord Jesus Christ for we will be purposefully stepping out and away from him and his ways.

The most stark example that I have witnessed of this was in Africa. He was a pastor with a huge anointing of the Holy Spirit upon his life. When he prayed the heavens shook. But he was without holiness.

Over the course of a few days alongside this man it became apparent that many things were wrong. What had initially thrown me (why I was there in the first place) was the incredible anointing of the Holy

Spirit. Yet I was quickly reminded that the anointing of the Lord is upon us because of who God is, and not because of who we are.

In short, this man had a huge church structure, one of the biggest I have seen in Uganda. Yet, my first hour in his church I could sense a spirit of chaos and of confusion. Later, I saw that he had pornography on his data-stick. And then, I came to find that his congregation consisted of the prayer team of about six women... only six women in a sanctuary the size of a basketball court.

Things had and were going seriously wrong with this man and his ministry. I saw other things that raised a red flag, both in practice and in terms of his heart motives; he was consistently toying with unholiness, and the Lord's favor was leaving him. He had a giant church building with next to no congregation, a decreased influence within his community – it was a tragedy to see.

What comes to mind is the parable of the talents as found in Matthew 25. Commonly considered to be about money I am convinced that the parable of the talents also can and does refer to the giftings of our lives, the anointing of the Spirit, the favor we have been given, the knowledge that we have, the wisdoms from the Lord, and more.

Everything we are privileged to steward is given us by the Lord and must be taken care of, wielded with great care, and invested with diligence and intention. All of this requires that we see the big picture and part of this is that we must get it that our actions matter, our hearts matter, our decisions matter. Our holiness matters.

A big part of what we have been given in Christ is holiness. We are set apart unto the Lord's good works and there is no place for unholiness in the mix of this. Is there grace and restoration, of course, but only as we turn from our sin. Turning is key. It evidences a heart turned away from the sins that we love and turned toward our Lord who is holy, and who makes us holy.

So, when we refuse this turning, when we want Christ but not his cleansing of our lives, we will remain in poverty of heart, soul, mind and body. God will not be mocked, he does not favor our lives if we are not favouring his Spirit by our lives. In this, we choose poverty of life, of relationships, of business dealings, and of ministry influence. We and our families and our influence suffers when we are not solid and abiding in holiness as a way of life.

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## 7. Poverty Strongholds – Agreements With the Enemy

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship – link to past article
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
- 6. Agreements with the Enemy**
7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
10. Pain Upon Pain

Today, let's take a look at the 6th Poverty Stronghold – Agreements with the Enemy

Imagine this, on one side of you is God and he is saying all manner of life and blessing over you.

I have for you a future and a hope  
I have known you since before time  
I am with you always  
I created you and called you good  
In me (Christ) there is no condemnation  
I have special work for you

And then, on the other side of you is Satan and he is saying all manner of death and destruction over you.

He comes only to lie and steal  
He brings chaos  
Death is his specialty  
Despair is his voice  
He accuses you  
He is the tempter  
And you are between the two.

The Bible speaks numerous times about the need for a second witness. Throughout historical times all matters of law had to be decided on the basis of two witnesses for instance. And Jesus himself asserted that where two or more are gathered in his name that he is among them.

And so, as we have God on one hand and Satan on the other, each speaking over us, we are the ones deciding with whom we will agree, we create the second witness.

And what we agree with is what is established in our lives.

Without the knowledge of our Lord we will make agreements with Satan. This is why we are admonished to bring every thought into captivity and into surrender to the Lord. Agreeing with the heart of God is the only way to find fulness of life. Agreeing with Satan will only bring us chaos and destruction.

When we see and experience poverty in its many forms we can be sure that there have been both personal and corporate agreements with Satan; ultimately in the biggest picture sense, poverty is simply the outflow, the evidence, the result, the fruit, of agreeing with Satan.

As with any strongholds, while we cannot battle the entirety of poverty systems, we can begin with ourselves. We can begin by assessing our own agreements, "Where have I agreed to the lies and destruction of the enemy?"

[Steve Siebold](#), author of "[How Rich People Think](#)," spent nearly three decades interviewing millionaires around the world to find out what separates them from everyone else. What he found is a vast difference in the mindsets of people regarding life and money.

Below is a small sample of the difference in thinking. On the left we have how the average person thinks, on the right we have how the non-average person thinks — what in North America we call middle class or world class thinking.

### **Middle Class Thinking or World Class Thinking**

competes	versus	creates
avoids risk	versus	manages risk
lives in delusion	versus	lives in objective reality
loves to be comfortable	versus	is comfortable being uncomfortable
has a lottery mentality	versus	has an abundance mentality
hungers for security	versus	doesn't believe security exists
sacrifices growth for safety	versus	sacrifices safety for growth
operates from fear and scarcity	versus	operates from love and abundance
sees themselves as victims	versus	sees themselves as responsible
slows down	versus	calms down

Now, from what I can tell from all my years and experience, the column on the left looks like the lies of the enemy (in our very thoughts) and the column on the right sounds more like what I read in the Bible and what I know of God and how he calls us to think and live.

Let's see what scripture has to say about these things:

- **avoids risk** (and who by worry can add a single hour to his life, Matthew 6:27)
- vs. **manages risk** (the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14-30)
- **competes** (do nothing from rivalry or conceit, Philippians 2:3)
- vs. **creates** (whatever you do, work heartily as unto the Lord, Colossians 3:23)
- **lives in delusion** (the god of this age has blinded ... 2 Corinthians 4:4)
- vs. **lives in objective reality** (think of yourself with sober judgment, Romans 12:3)
- **loves to be comfortable** (in this world you will have tribulation, John 16:33)
- vs. **is comfortable being uncomfortable** (endure hardship, 2 Timothy 4:5)
- **has a lottery mentality** (do not store up treasures on earth, Matthew 6:19-21)
- vs. **has an abundance mentality** (sell your possessions and give to the poor, Luke 12:33)
- **hungers for security** (for whoever would save his life will lose it, Luke 9:24)
- vs. **doesn't believe security exists** (though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Psalm 23:4)
- **sacrifices growth for safety** (for God has not given us a spirit of timidity, 2 Timothy 1:7)

- vs. **sacrifices safety for growth** (unless a grain of wheat dies, John 12:24-25)
- **operates from fear and scarcity** (do not wear yourself out to get rich, Proverbs 23:4)
- vs. **operates from love and abundance** (be devoted to one another in love, Rom 12:10)
- **sees themselves as victims** (all day long he craves and craves, Proverbs 21:25-26)
- vs. **sees themselves as responsible** (each of you must take responsibility, Galatians 6:5-7)
- **slows down** (therefore we do not lose heart, 2 Corinthians 4:16)
- vs. **calms down** (peace I leave with you, John 14:27)

I don't know about you, but I want to have world-class thinking. I want to be reaching for all that God has for me, I want to be giving my life away for the betterment of our communities and nations. I want to be settled into His truth for me. What about you?

The agreements with the enemy, or our agreements with God, and how these things play out in our lives are subtle, very subtle. And so this is why we are admonished by the Lord:

**“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” Jeremiah 17:9-10**

**“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Proverbs 4:23**

**“And we tear down every proud idea that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We also capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:5**

We can tell what is in our hearts by the thoughts in our minds, and we can tell the thoughts in our minds by the emotions and judgments of our hearts. Agreements with either the enemy or with God show up in our judgments of life and the conclusions we have made about many things. These conclusions, our judgments, the emotions of our heart, our thinking, all either lead to life or lead to death.

We do not want to live according to *“life will always knock you down”* but we want to live by *“I have plans for you, a future and a hope.”*

We do not want to live according to *“I just can't figure this out”* but we want to live by *“he is our help in times of trouble”*

We do not want to live according to *“All the other people are just lucky”* but we want to live by *“He who is faithful with a little will be faithful with much”*

And more. We could go on and on. Bringing our thoughts and our judgments captive to obedience to Christ is nothing more than receiving God's worldview deep into our beings and is a work that we must all be aware of and open to.

If we want our lives to express and actualize the grace and bounty of our Lord (in heart, mind, spirit, and body), then it does us good to eradicate from our thinking and from the judgments of our hearts all that is against God and the truths that he reveals to us. We want to agree with God.

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## 8. Poverty Strongholds – Bad Theology

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship – link to past article
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. **Bad Theology**
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
10. Pain Upon Pain

### Today, let's take a look at the **7th Poverty Stronghold – Bad Theology**

Bad theology leads to many bad things. It is the root of all sorts of distortions and manipulations perpetrated by supposedly godly men and women. Here are just a few of the craziest things I have heard while overseas:

“The wealthier you are the holier you are.”  
(this is a literal quote from a Kampala city pastor)

“The woman with the seven husbands, well, she killed them all and what we take from this story is that the seed must be planted in the right place, and this is the right place for your seed, so tithe to this church and you will be blessed.”

“We must all change our names because Abram's name was changed”

“Do not sleep at the wrong times because this was the cause of the Hebrews being in slavery for 400 years in Egypt.”

Even as I write this I hardly have words. I am astounded time and again at the kinds of bad theology that I come across in my work. But, I am also, often enough to note, just as astounded by the bad theology found at home. For instance:

“When the bad people go to hell you will be happy about this”

“God can only use you in proportion to how good your marriage is”

“I won't serve God as He is asking, because this will reveal my pride”

Now, often bad theologies are derived from one verse without being balanced out with the remainder of scripture. Yet, we know that the entirety of scripture is necessary in order to avoid errors in thought. Consider this verse,

**“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”  
Psalm 119:160**

The pastor preaching about the sleep had started his message in Mark 13 where we are told to remain alert because Jesus is coming again one day. He must have looked up the word 'sleep', found all other

passages about sleep and wove together this crazy story about how sleeping at the wrong times leads to many bad things. sigh ...

The word of God is a holy trust to us. We must take it seriously and do the hard work of searching the scriptures and reading it and knowing it inside and out, so that we do not distort the heart of our Lord through our beliefs and sermons.

During my recent time in Uganda I was told about a group of Christians who believe that to study is wrong, and that to be 'led by the spirit' one must simply get up on stage on a Sunday and speak what the Spirit brings to mind — to do anything less than this, to study and prepare, is to disobey the Spirit. This is another bad theology.

It is taking this verse:

**“And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” 2 Corinthians 2:13**

But not this verse:

**“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:14**

And perhaps we have never read that, **“Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.” Ezra 7:10**

So, how does all this apply to poverty? Well, when we have faulty foundation of thinking and of understanding who God is we will either take advantage of other people, or we will be taken advantage of, either of which contribute to strongholds of poverty in our lives.

Our thinking establishes our starting place for action. If I believe, for instance, that sickness is the natural result of sin in our lives then I may not have faith or a desire to pray healing. If I believe, for instance, that God is a god of recompense and demands dues given, then I will not have the theological underpinnings to declare healing for others (unless they prove they are worthy of healing, to me and in context of my paradigm).

But, if I believe that God delights to heal us, that Jesus has covered over every sin and that there are no set-conditions on the healing of the Lord then I will have both the faith but also the strength of will, so to speak, (I won't have an divided heart and mind), and great freedom to pray and to see healing for anyone I come in contact with. Theology matters.

We can discern distinctions in our thoughts by taking our 'assumptions' about God and how the world works to their farthest logical conclusion. When we exaggerate a belief (often letter of the law thinking without an understanding of the spirit of the law) we can see if it results as either the fruit of the Lord (all manner of good things within our hearts and minds unto others) or the fruit of the enemy (all manner of hateful, pinched and narrow reckonings for others).

Here are a few examples of these types of distortions:

“Submit to your husband” has resulted in women becoming accomplices to all manner of deadly life choices and even criminal activity.

“Obey your leaders” has resulted in childish adults who can only do what they are told and who have no thought or action for themselves and often no sense of freedom regarding following or obeying the call of God.

“You must tithe here and now” results in the powerful and charismatic ‘eating’ the poor woman’s meal. Literally, pastors come in, preach health and wealth, demand a tithe because ‘now God will bless you’, and they go home with riches and the poor are left even poorer. (NOTE: This, should make us angry.)

Perhaps we sum all this up by quoting Jesus,

**“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for pretence you make long prayers; therefore you will receive the greater condemnation.” Matthew 23:13-14**

We don’t want that, we want this:

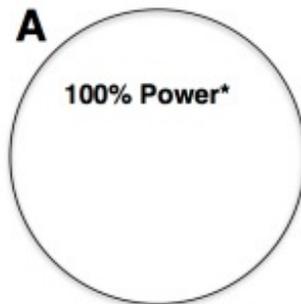
**“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” Psalm 1:1-3**

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## 9. Poverty Strongholds – Blaming & Excuses

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship – link to past article
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. Bad Theology
- 8. Blaming & Excuses**
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
10. Pain Upon Pain

Let’s take a look at the 8th Poverty Stronghold – Blaming & Excuses

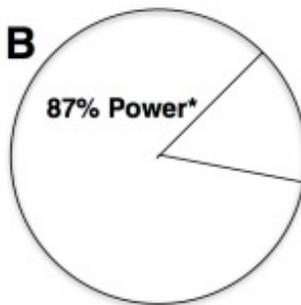


**100% Power\***

We begin in life with the ability to take responsibility for our own lives within our specific context and circumstances.

We would say that we have 100% ability to be responsible for our lives - this could be described as having the power to move our lives forward — As in DIAGRAM A

As we go along in life bad things happen. There are hurts and wounds, there are injustices from without, there are confounding in all forms.

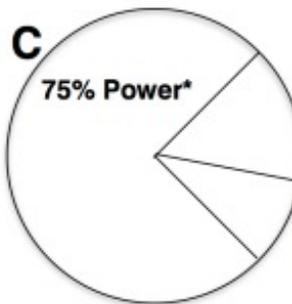


**87% Power\***

If our response to these things is to blame others or to make excuses for ourselves, it is as though we are cutting out a part of our power and giving it away.

For instance, "My parents didn't love me", or "I never got an education", etc.

While these things may have been true, to use them as excuse for your life gives them way too much continued power over your live — As in DIAGRAM B

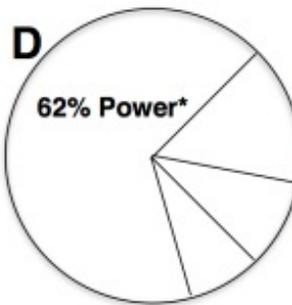


**75% Power\***

If we make a habit of blaming and of excusing then we will continue to give our power away — As in DIAGRAM C

"The government is crappy", "The school system is terrible", or "That person took my opportunity" again, only gives away your personal power (strength and vision and more) to move your life forward — As in DIAGRAM D

If the problems that you have are the fault of others, then you are a victim and you are stuck. There is nothing you can do if everyone else is to blame.



**62% Power\***

But, if you begin to take back your power, if and as you take full responsibility for the current state of your life, then you will begin to know the actions to take, the decisions to make, and where your energy might best be used for the next part of your life.

Habits of excuse making and of blaming others can be reversed. It will take some concerted effort on your part, and immense bravery and courage to stand in your rightful place of power over your own life, but it can be done. You can reclaim DIAGRAM A as your life reality.



by Cyndy Lavoie & Capturing Courage International Ministries

\*Power is defined as our personal ability to move our lives forward

We begin in life with the ability to take responsibility for our own lives within our specific context and circumstances. We would say that we have 100% ability to be responsible for our lives – this could be described as having the power to move our lives forward — As in DIAGRAM A

As we go along in life bad things happen. There are hurts and wounds, there are injustices from without, there are confounding in all forms. If our response to these things is to blame others or to make excuses for ourselves, it is as though we are cutting out a part of our power and giving it away.

For instance, "My parents didn't love me", or "I never got an education", etc. While these things may have been true, to use them as excuse for your life gives them way too much continued power over your live — As in DIAGRAM B

If we make a habit of blaming and of excusing then we will continue to give our power away — As in DIAGRAM C

"The government is crappy", "The school system is terrible", or "That person took my opportunity" again, only gives away your personal power (strength and vision and more) to move your life forward — As in DIAGRAM D

If the problems that you have are the fault of others, then you are a victim and you are stuck. There is nothing you can do if everyone else is to blame.

But, if you begin to take back your power, if and as you take full responsibility for the current state of your life, then you will begin to know the actions to take, the decisions to make, and where your energy might best be used for the next part of your life.

Habits of excuse making and of blaming others can be reversed. It will take some concerted effort on your part, and immense bravery and courage to stand in your rightful place of power over your own life, but it can be done. You can reclaim DIAGRAM A as your life reality.

To reclaim the full power (again, remember that power means the ability to move your life forward) there are a few old habits to refuse and a few new habits to acquire.

### **I. Old Habits to Refuse:**

- stop speaking out blame
- stop speaking out excuses

Even if someone else has done something wrong that has influenced or impacted your life, you do not have to bring that to attention, you do not have to focus on it, and you do not need to try and make that thing right.

Every day for every one of us things go wrong. Life has trouble. Many things we cannot control or change. BUT we can control and change our attitudes, the words that we use and how we use them, and our general way of going about life.

Remember, that our life springs from our hearts, and at the issue of blaming and of making excuse is the issue of a heart that is demanding others to fix things, that is judging others for their actions and choices, and that is basically surrendering to the difficulties of life.

Now, we cannot even change our own hearts all the way, much of heart transformation is the work of the Lord. But we can choose the words that come out of our mouth and changing from a habit that gives power away to a life that stands in strength begins with our words.

So the first thing to do is to listen to your own words. What are you speaking? Are you making excuses for the things you do or don't do, are you blaming others for where things are at? This must stop. Nothing will change unless you refuse to speak blame and excuse.

Consider these two variations on a situation (this is a north american example):

You are late to an appointment. There was an accident on the freeway and then a car in front of you had car trouble and things went from bad to worse. Here are two ways you could navigate the conversation when you finally arrive at your destination.

A. "I can't believe I am so late, I was on the freeway and then there was this accident, you wouldn't believe the back-up and the tow-trucks seemed to take their sweet time (rolls eyes) and then just when I thought I'd get going again the car in front of me had car trouble (rolls eyes again), its just been a crappy day all around and I'm not even sure I'm up for that meeting we were going to have."

B. "I am sorry I am late. Let's start right in."

Which one is more powerful?

It is so simple, and difficult, and powerful. As you simply stop speaking (stop yourself mid-sentence if you must) blame and excuse your life will change. Your heart will shift, you will see life differently, and out of this the fruit of your life will increasingly become healthy.

## 2. New Habit to Acquire:

- take 100% responsibility for your life as it is now (and as it has been)

Taking 100% responsibility is not to say that everything has been your responsibility. It is simply a place to come from and a space to hold for your own life. As you come from this place of taking 100% responsibility you will be surprised by the shift within your mind. All of a sudden what seemed insurmountable obstacles have clear solutions and what seemed lost and broken takes on new possibilities.

So, we simultaneously refuse to blame or make excuses and we take on 100% responsibility for our actions and our choices and for where we have ended up to this point in time in our lives.

Of course, this is more difficult than it sounds.

The most difficult piece of this is the humility required to make no excuses. For instance, consider that you had made a commitment to deliver a package to a friend on a certain day but you didn't get the package to your friend when you said you would. Perhaps you ran out of money for the journey, perhaps you got lost, maybe your grandma died and you just couldn't make it. It doesn't matter if the reason is small or big, a person who is intent on taking back the full power of their lives will not make excuse for what went wrong, they will simply acknowledge the mistake and take responsibility for it.

"I am sorry that I am two days late getting this to you." end of sentence. Nothing more need be said. You don't have to explain that your grandma died, that you got lost, or that you just didn't have the money to get there on time. This is your inside knowledge, but do not use that knowledge to make excuse. Do not speak these things out loud.

Often, these sorts of things are understood to be an 'explanation' or 'reasons' why, but I tell you, the people depending on you are not really interested in your reasons why such and such couldn't happen, they want to know if you are a leader willing to take responsibility for your own actions (if you cannot take responsibility for your own actions how can you take responsibility for your organization or for the promises and commitments you are making to them or to your community or nation?). Bottom line, giving your 'reasons' will undermine other people's trust in you.

And as you speak your reasons and explanations you will undermine your own trust in you. The words we speak create neural pathways of habitual thought and ultimately action. To speak from a victim position (when we blame or excuse we are in the victim position), is to convince your own self that there is nothing that you can do, that you are simply surrendered to whatever life brings your way. You will try your best of course but you may come to believe that not much can be done. Your own life suffers first and foremost.

So, I encourage you to begin paying attention to the words coming out of your mouth. Hear how often you make excuse or blame others. You may be shocked by what you find. Listen for the tiniest excuse making. And then stop speaking these things. This will take some work, but it is very doable.

Then, begin taking 100% responsibility for the state of your life. Bit by bit look at the various areas of your life and assess where you are not taking responsibility. Ask yourself what it might look like to take 100% responsibility for that area of your life. If you cannot get past the blaming of others then spend some time forgiving and letting go of bitterness regarding the impact others have had on you. These things are real of course, but they do not have to have any power over you. You can go forward despite the terrible bad things done by others.

Again, as you focus on what has gone wrong, as you speak blame, as you make excuse, you give your power away, again and again and again. You want to regain this back in full measure. So bit by bit intentionally release blaming and excuse making and find your life belonging to you once more.

Go in the grace of the Lord into full power (which is always 100% responsibility) over your life.

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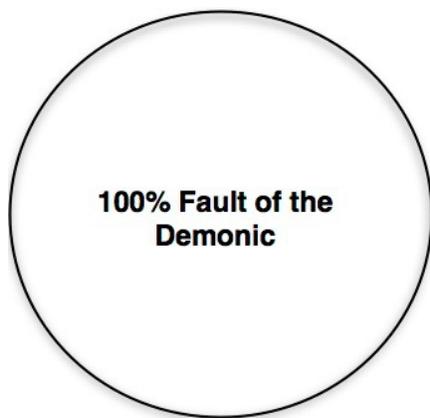
## 10. Poverty Strongholds – The Demonic Factor

1. **Demons**
2. Poor Stewardship – link to past article
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
10. Pain Upon Pain

Today, let's take a look at the 1st Poverty Stronghold – Demons

On our original pie chart and in our list of poverty strongholds we had demons as first on the list. This was because the thinking that led to this entire series began with a theology relayed to us of how demons were the entire problem for all poverty and for everything that goes wrong.

In a certain area in Uganda we were told that all of the pervasive problems of that region were due to this very large tree that had had a demon in it, and that when the tree was cut down and distributed throughout the entire area the demonic stronghold became established in the entire area. This was the understanding, the belief, the theology. This is what we were told was the entire problem.

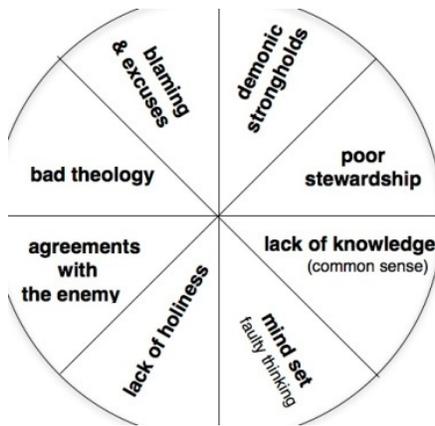


But of course, as a professional people developer and as a prayer minister, I know that if we give all blame (ie:credit) to the demonic we have just given fully 100% of our power away, we've become victims and have entered ourselves into apathy and despair. So I roughly jotted out my thinking about this issue with the result being this series of posts. Today, in this series, I finally come to address the demonic factor. Let's talk about that.

Now, although the demonic factor is not anywhere near 100% responsible for poverty that some would have it, there are of course demonic forces at work within this world.

I am not an expert per se and although I have always been aware of the spirit realm and can sense the demonic, have had my own run-ins with the demonic, am praying away the demonic off of

people all of the time, I try not to be a demonologist. I do not believe that we have to 'go after' the demonic. Rather, we bring in the light and darkness flees. Simple as that.



At the same time, where the demonic is messing around with us it is helpful to have a bit of understanding about how this works and so I'll simply give you what I have come to understand.

I am fairly pragmatic about demons, meaning, they are where they are with the power that they have as determined by our permission and agreement with them (ie: our agreeing to lies, condemnations, shame, of the enemy). Demonic forces are not random happenstance but fall under the ordered universe just as everything else does.

Personally for individuals, I would explain it this way: Demons guard their handiwork. Meaning, when we have undergone traumatic situations there may be (not always of course) demonic strongholds keeping guard over the results of the trauma. The results of trauma in our inner person show up in our hates, our

fears, and the confounding beliefs deep in our psyche (our internal responses to the trauma), which the demonic seem to guard.

Often, when praying inner healing with a person, the demon uses fear or intimidation to try to keep healing from happening. The person will experience this as his or her own fear and will sometimes speak warped rationale about why they are really okay (when they are obviously not). Sometimes, people will even use scripture to defend their strongholds.

Basically, in this, the person is agreeing with the demonic and this is part of the reason why it is still present in their lives. Just as we learned about how agreements result in poverty strongholds, the same thing happens with the demonic. Agreeing with the lies, condemnations, assignments, and curses, of the enemy results in a firmer grip of the demonic on our lives.

NOTE: These agreements will always feel like truth to the person themselves. The lies and paradigms about life are embedded in a person's entire understanding about themselves, about how the world works, and about God, and this is why we call this a stronghold.

The healing process for this happens a few different ways. Again, in an inner healing context with individuals we bring the light of Christ to the stronghold. This can be done by illuminating the lies and the agreements with the enemy that have been made (with confession and repentance – [see the healing prayer process](#)) and that are now confounding the person. Also, we can invite the true Lord Jesus to show up in people's memories and as he does the lies and agreements associated with that memory are immediately undone; Jesus' presence radically transforms us, darkness cannot remain where there is light.

That is, in a nutshell, the basis for personally being set free of demonic strongholds. In a corporate sense, in terms of demonic strongholds over entire areas, the same principles hold true. At some point in time there was corporate agreement to the lies of Satan, and demons are now holding forth to protect that domain acquired.

Again, domain acquired, only ever happens by our agreement (often the agreements of those gone before us). Remember, we create the second witness ([refer to poverty stronghold post regarding agreements](#)). In a corporate sense, this is where the body of Christ is to be in ministry in this world as salt and light. We, those of us called by the name of the Lord are invited to facilitate and participate in bringing the transformation of Jesus.

**“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14**

(Read Daniel 9 – Daniel had no personal responsibility for the sins of the Hebrew people, but he confessed their sins as his own and facilitated the freedom of the Lord on behalf of his people. In this way Daniel's life pointed forward to the work of Jesus. Jesus died on a cross to take on the responsibility for the sins of all mankind, standing in your and my place declaring, "I did that" and thereby freeing us from all of the weight and work and ramifications of our sin.)

We, agreeing with each other and with the Holy Spirit, can also take on 100% responsibility for the sins of our communities (the agreements made with the enemy before we were even born). Repenting and confessing these agreements with the enemy begins the process of ushering in the Kingdom of God over our communities and nations.

This of course, only comes after the hard inner work of personally bringing our own hearts in continued transparency before the Lord and inviting and allowing God to burn away the chaff of our own thinking, our own mindsets, our own wounds, our own traumas, and our own agreements with the enemy.

This is why I've not written about the demonic until now in this series. The strongholds of the demonic can in fact be loosed off of entire regions, but only as we are faithfully living the truth of God in the rest of our lives. For instance by:

- Living out good stewardship
- Taking on common sense and do not over-spiritualize
- Changing our mind-sets to accurately reflect truth
- Committing ourselves unto holiness day by day
- Beginning to agree with what God says about us and about life
- Speaking and living good theology that is accurate and without distortion
- Stop blaming and making excuses for our life
- Taking 100% responsibility for our own lives

When, a community of people, even a small group of faithful Christ-followers, gathers together in personal confession and repentance, spurring one another on to these life transformations, they will then in due time be led by the Spirit to take responsibility for their neighbourhood, their village, their town, and their district.

This is not works theology, but rather an issue of faithfulness and a matter of how things work in the spirit realm. Wherever there is healing of the Lord over our lives you can be sure that someone somewhere has done the hard work of interceding and of bearing the weight of that work in their being. Much like a woman giving birth to a baby labours to bring forth new life, we too, must labor (in secret and in the inner place before the Lord) before, and in order for, new life to come to our own lives, our families, our communities, and our nations.

The work of Christ on the cross to defeat evil is brought to bear upon our lives and our communities by our repentance. Repentance is agreement with God in terms of what has gone wrong, it is agreement that only God can set it right, and it is our agreement to be agents of what is right through our very lives. In this, our repentance loosens the strength of strongholds and it is repentance that participates in ushering in the work of Christ.

Therefore, I'll say it again, for those who would take on repentance for their communities they must begin with their own faithfulness unto repentance before the Lord with their own strongholds.

This does a couple of things, first it enters us further into the covering of Christ and only from this vantage point and position can we declare strongholds broken in the spirit realm without being taken out by the enemy.

I say this because you cannot, for instance, pray lust off of your community if you have hidden secret lust in your own life. The enemy laughs at this and will take you down. You cannot pray off a spirit of child abuse if you are secretly abusing children. And you cannot pray off spirits of poverty if you are not willing to take responsibility for your participation in the mindsets and thinking that accompanies poverty.

Key point is: we cannot facilitate the transformation of God over our communities if we have not allowed transformation in our own lives, (here we would be using the Lord's name in vain, something we are commanded not to do).

But then, as we are freed of personal strongholds and experience the freedom and grace of the Lord and his holiness in our being is established, we are freed and able to, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, declare strongholds over our communities done and cancelled, with whole regions freed unto the light of Christ.

We do this within the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit. We do this by the process of taking personal responsibility first. If you head into praying away demonic strongholds over your region in some head-strong, rash, quick-fix kind of way, you will receive backlash from the enemy.

Enter into the spirit realm without being in the righteousness of Christ, shout accusations and hate and contempt at the enemy and guess what, you are now playing the enemies game, not God's. If you breed and grow hatred in your heart for the enemy you are now doing exactly what the enemy would have you do. Satan does not, for instance, care if you hate him, his only goal is that you hate.

The only safe way through the spirit realm is tucked right into the covering of Jesus Christ. He entered into hell and conquered death and has defeated satan and all demons. We remain in him, abiding in his presence, allowing his healing, walking in his righteousness, becoming holy as he is holy, and all is good, we are covered and kept by the blood of Jesus Christ and we become agents of his freedom and healing for others and by our agreements with the Lord of hosts the Kingdom of God is ushered into our lives and the communities in which we live.

So, to wrap up, the demonic is real and is active, but, the demonic must bow to Jesus just as everything else will do. We, become participants of God's Kingdom as we change the agreements we have made with the enemy and as we take on (living, acting, speaking, responding) agreements with God. We, after time and established faithfulness, can then participate in declaring God's ways over entire regions.

The pastor who told us about the tree and the demon and the region completely given over to that power, wanted us to come in and pray away the stronghold. There was this quick-fix mentality (which, by the way is a poverty mentality); because I have spiritual authority he thought that I could just pray away all that was bad and wrong, but of course, this is not how it works.

Every stronghold has been established and strengthened through much agreement, in words, in action, in choices, in sin habits, in faulty thinking, and more (all that we have previously been discussing). These things cannot just be prayed away, because they are buried within the psyche of the people. To just pray them away without doing the hard inner work to dismantle the lies and such, would leave the people vulnerable to even more stronghold.

So, this is why I have left the conversation about the demonic element of poverty stronghold till this time. The demonic is real and active but we participate in bringing the new life of Christ to our regions by our very lives as we stand in heart agreements unto God and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To those who would rush to shout out against the enemy, to those who would want a quick fix against the darkness I would admonish to begin with our lives that need addressing; bring in the light of Christ and darkness will flee. Live unto God and the enemy will lose it's grip.

**“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” Ephesians 6:10-17**

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## 11. Poverty Strongholds – Pain Upon Pain

1. Demons
2. Poor Stewardship
3. Lack of Knowledge (common sense)
4. Mind Sets (faulty thinking)
5. Lack of Holiness
6. Agreements with the Enemy
7. Bad Theology
8. Blaming & Excuses
9. Refusing to be a Blessing
- 10. Pain Upon Pain**

Today in conclusion to this series I am writing about **#10 Poverty Stronghold, Pain Upon Pain.**

[My original doodling of this material](#), while in Uganda, began with the first 8 strongholds, and then once home and as I was writing my first post about this topic I realized that pain upon pain is a critical contributor to poverty strongholds. In identifying this I thought I would rework the Poverty Stronghold Diagram / Pie Chart to add in pain upon pain, and yet, as I've been fleshing out the rest of the material I realized that in fact, pain upon pain is a stronghold that overlays all of the other strongholds; we see that strongholds of Pain Upon Pain are laid over it all, informing and confounding each individual stronghold in turn.

I begin by repeating here what I wrote in my first post regarding pain upon pain that is buried deep in a people and passed on to generations after generations:

“I initially came upon this on my fourth trip to Africa in the country of Mozambique. I had been to an amazing church and people for a few days and then moved locations, a mere twenty-minute bike ride away, where the tenor of the place was profoundly different. There was an oppression over the village unlike anything I have ever experienced before. At every moment (literally) there was a child sobbing — and worse, the adults and parents either ignored or mocked these sobbing children. At

first I thought it was just very bad parenting, but then the Lord revealed to me that, “No Cyndy, this is pain upon pain.”

What was so interesting in this place was that the homes were the same, everyone was dressed the same as elsewhere in the country, there was plenty of food, all the outward elements required for safety, shelter, and food were in place and yet, this village had a profound spirit of poverty pervading the place.

The homes were dirtier, the children neglected, the teens mocked the elderly women (shocking for me to see this in Africa – it was then I knew something was very wrong in that place), and the eyes of the people carried profound sadness. It was, I recognized, the first time I had come across poverty in my travels within Africa. And so, when we consider strongholds of poverty I cannot leave out realities of pain upon pain. This, from what I have seen, creates the most crippling poverty of all.”

I and those I was travelling with, were only in this village for twenty-four hours, and it was all we could do to stay there that long. The oppression of grief and despair was so compounded that it was as though a giant tree had fallen on us and we were gasping for air. And truly, after that experience, I don't think I have seen poverty anywhere else.

From the book Helping the Poor Without Hurting Them, we find the author identifying poverty as described by those in poverty themselves, and what he found is telling. “*The poor describe poverty as: shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation, and voicelessness.*”

Nowhere, in the words of the poor themselves, do they describe poverty as a lack of material possessions, but rather as a loss of meaning, hope and purpose.

This is an important distinction and one we often miss. When I think back to my own years when my ex-husband was caught in drug and alcohol addiction I recall a frozenness in my ability to cope or to lift myself out of the confounding of that time.

I was so knocked over with these very things, *shame, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation and voicelessness*, that I couldn't see to a clear way out. And so, for instance, when food became scarce my answer was to eat very little so my children could eat; for some time I was literally starving myself so that my children would have food. This, of course, is no answer at all, and yet it was the only one I could grab hold of at the time.

Pain upon pain does this. It freezes our responses and bogs us down in a sea of confusion; we can't really see which way is up. When a person is physically drowning I am told they thrash and drag down any would-be rescuers. In a similar way, when a person is drowning in emotional, psychological, and relational pain they too 'drag down' those around them; in their thrashing they hurt others with the pain they themselves are experiencing. Hurt people hurt others.

And so the cycles of pain upon pain become embedded in families, communities, and nations. With pain upon pain over-laying *stewardship, lack of Knowledge, mind sets, issues of holiness, agreements with the enemy, bad theology, and blaming & excuses*, we can see the multiple confounding and the multilayered 'stuckness' of entire communities.

And, as I write this I clearly see, clearer than ever before, why it is so important the work that Capturing Courage International Ministries does in standing back the pain upon pain in the hearts and souls and minds of people.

As a prayer minister working with many individuals over many years there are times when I'll be working with someone who has so much pain that if they had the rest of their lives and all the necessary emotional energy, they still would not have enough *oomph* to process all the pain that they carry.

It is at times like this that the Holy Spirit instructs me to 'just pray that pain away'. It is the tangible outworking of verses like, "I'll enter the darkness and remove the yoke from their necks," and "Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed."

This is the work I do around the world. As I travel to communities and gather with people I preach the kingdom of God always with an eye to kneeling together before the cross of Jesus and declaring, putting down, loosing off, the pains that confound us.

As is custom, when we were leaving the village in Mozambique we first entered the pastors home, the people broke out in song and then it was my turn to pray before we left and I prayed something like this,

*"God I lift this village and people to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. God we see the pain upon pain that is here, carried in the hearts and lives of these people. Today I say enough is enough! In the name of my Lord Jesus Christ I declare a stop to these cycles of pain here and now. I put a stick in this wheel of pain and despair. No more! I reach with the strong yet gentle hand of my Lord Jesus Christ into each life and I touch the pain and declare the soothing of the Lord, the healing of Jesus, the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Today God we claim these people for your glory and we remove them from the despair of the enemy. Today I press a little bit of your gladness upon their lives, today we begin and declare a new way for them; from this day on may they not remain the same, but may they know you as the lifter of their heads. Amen and amen."*

The authority that I have to pray this for others is because I've found God more than big enough for my own pain upon pain. Years back I recall seeing the pain of my life as a witches cauldron that if I entered I'd never come out of. But God kept wooing me, showing me that he was in the pain, and so bit by bit I entered in and worked my way through. What I came to find was that it was no witches cauldron at all, but rather a reservoir of living water that now spills out to all others round about me.

The presence of God changed my pain into healing for many others. And what is interesting, as I've been writing these poverty stronghold posts and as I get to today's topic, is that I've recently realized that I personally no longer have any pain.

About a week after I returned home from Uganda, around Christmas time, I realized that I had no pain, no relational pain, no regret pain, no loss pain, no pain. For a few weeks, and a few times every week since, I have scanned my mind and heart and soul for the pain that I've always had and it is not there. No pain. This has been quite amazing to me as I cannot recall a time without pain, it has certainly been some couple of decades if not my entire life. And the lasting thought has been, "It's possible!"

While pain upon pain is the most crippling poverty of all, while within it we cannot see our hand in front of our faces, we cannot perceive accurately, and we are confounded in all our good efforts, the power of God to heal us, to touch us, to leave us refreshed is literal and real.

When I finished praying that day in Mozambique, and as I opened my eyes the women were wiping their tears with their aprons. We never had a chance to talk about what I was seeing, but the Lord touched them through my prayer. As part of healing, sometimes all we need is the validation of the pain that is present.

I've not yet been back to that village in Mozambique, but I've been told they are a bit freer and different since that day. And I hear this time and again as I minister many places. The touch of God into our pain changes our lives for the better. It is something only God can do.

While all of the other poverty strongholds are shifts and movements that we can make within our own lives, to be loosed of pain upon pain we must come in close, close, closer than we ever dared, to the feet of the Lord, the foot of the cross, the robe of God, the touch of Jesus, and allow him to see us and to touch us, to heal us and to refresh us. It is possible. I've lived it and I see it all the time, again and again.

Glory be to the Lord.