

Sin / Faith Circle

People seek help from others when they are experiencing bad behavior or negative emotions. They seek an answer to overcome their perceived problem. Typically, the first question is “what do I need to do?” It is a good question, but not the correct one. If you want to change how you behave or how you feel, change what you believe. A person will always act out of what they believe.

At Freedom in Christ Ministries, we recommend that people learn the Biblical truths of their identity and freedom in Christ by either reading *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* by our founder, Dr. Neil T. Anderson; going through *The Freedom in Christ Course* on their own or with others; or reading our free, downloadable book *Restored*. After this, we encourage them to go through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* on their own or with a trained encourager. *The Steps* is a guide that encourages you to be still before God and trust the Holy Spirit to guide you as you reflect on the areas of your life where your thoughts and actions are not in alignment with God. I am always amazed when people sit for hours before God and clearly hear him speaking to them and bringing to their mind areas that require confession and repentance. At the end of the process, numerous sins have been confessed and wrong thinking has been addressed.

Most people feel a great sense of relief and freedom after going through *The Steps*. But my experience shows few are able to put the pieces in order. They don't know the sequence of what comes first and what that

leads to. We are told to not be ignorant of Satan's **schemes** (2 Cor. 2:11) and take every **thought** captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). **The word for schemes and thoughts is the same word, noema, which means mind.** Satan lies to us, and we believe it without realizing where the thoughts come from. We assume if we thought it, the thought came from us. We have thoughts that come from God, Satan and ourselves. To successfully walk in freedom, we must understand where our thoughts come from and that our thinking leads to our actions. I use a simple diagram called the Sin Circle to illustrate this and help people understand how the enemy and their own thinking is causing their struggles.

My Story

To help you understand how this works, I'll tell you some of my own story. At the age of 5, I started the first grade. Up until this point, my parents had allowed me to communicate with “baby” talk. Baby talk was my words I made up, and they knew what I meant. It was cute to them, and they lovingly let me continue in it. However, on the first day of school, my fellow students did not find my “baby” talk as cute as my parents did. They laughed at me when I talked. To make the first day even more memorable, the teacher asked the class to write their name on a piece of paper, and I was unable to do so. The first night of school my assignment was to write my name 100 times. Another area I felt inadequate was in art. Every day after lunch, my teacher gave the class a large piece of brown paper for art

class. Well, art was not my thing and still isn't. I drew the same stupid little drawing every day. After a few days, my teacher asked if I was able to draw anything else. I was not able to and still cannot today (you do not want me on your Pictionary team!). One week into school brought failures and a sense I did not measure up. My inner thought was I am not very smart and I need to try really hard. It amazes me that decades later, I can find myself looking at life through the eyes of a six-year-old boy who didn't measure up.

At age 14, three intoxicated men tried to kidnap me and a friend when we were playing basketball in my front yard. We lived on a lake in a fairly remote part of our town. My parents were not home, and there were no close neighbors. We ran from the three men and were uninjured physically. But the mental scars from that close call dug deep into my soul. I was also bullied by the same friend's older brother and two of his friends. They were 18 years old and outweighed me 60-100 pounds. I came home one day with a bloody nose and a busted lip. I vowed to never be bullied or overpowered again. I began a rigorous process of weight lifting, boxing and karate and developed an attitude of self-defense. My fear drove me deeper and deeper into creating a person others would not think they could take advantage of.

I became a follower of Christ at the age of 15. I had a strong faith and wanted to share Christ with all my friends. But I was never told that I had to go back and change the way I had learned to live in the world. For fifteen years, I had learned how to live life on my terms. Every thought and action was based on what I thought was right. When I accepted Christ, all

of that experience of living independent from God still existed.

I kept dragging that sense of not measuring up and not wanting to be over-powered through the next twenty-five years of my life. At 40, an incident happened, and I lost my mind with anger. When I got home, I stayed up late and asked God to show me what was wrong. I knew that kind of anger could cause me to easily kill someone, end up in prison and wonder what happened. I sat in my living room praying and asking God to show me the problem. Almost immediately, I could see the truck with the three intoxicated men driving down my driveway. My pulse jumped to 190 beats a minute. Twenty-five years later, I was still responding like a scared 14-year-old boy.

I thought I had fixed my problem and all would be well. I did not realize, however, that I needed to go back and let God bring to my mind every occurrence where traumatic events were stuck in my mind, causing bad behavior and negative emotions. That is the time I was introduced to Freedom in Christ and Neil Anderson. I read most of Neil's books and went through *The Steps to Freedom* on my own. I found tremendous freedom and decided at that point, I wanted to help others find the same freedom.

Through the years, I had a few instances where my temper was out of control. I was not an angry person and did not lose my temper quickly. But when I felt threatened or felt as if I was being overpowered or bullied, I overreacted. In those instances, I went straight from the feeling of no control to anger. I realized that my reaction was much greater than the event that happened. I was reacting

to something at a level 10 when the triggering event was a 4 or 5. That meant I was living life stuck at a 5 or 6 on a 1-10 scale. **I call this living with a “feeler” that is stuck. Instead of living each day beginning at 0 on your “feeler scale,” you begin stuck at some higher number.**

As I began helping others find their freedom, I saw that they did not understand this cause and effect in their lives. It was much easier to see it in someone else’s life than my own. The Sin Circle helped me understand my thinking and how the vow I made to never be overpowered had created strongholds in my life. **Understanding the progression or pattern in my thinking was a great help in understanding my trigger points. My behavior and emotions were following what I believed. The understanding that fear and control were at the center of my struggles was a huge breakthrough.** I began to surrender the outcomes of life to my loving Heavenly Father. My job was to exercise self-control and only control those things that pertained to my thoughts and actions. The rest was under His control and I learned to trust Him, in all things. I felt like the pressure was off for the first time in my life. Living a performance-based acceptance life eventually becomes exhausting.

How to Use the Sin Circle- Cycle of Feeling in Control (Successes)

It is recommended you go through *The Steps* before using the Sin Circle, but it is not necessary. In my story, periodic outburst of anger was the obvious and most disturbing part of my story. It seemingly came out of nowhere and felt uncontrollable. **Anger was**

the outer ring of my sin circle. Begin with the outside ring of the circle. Fill in that circle with the dominant negative emotion or bad behavior that is recurring in your life. It is the area you know you struggle with.

I asked myself what comes before the outburst of anger. I realized it was often preceded by a critical spirit, perfectionism and a strong sense of competition. That mindset came with my thoughts to try harder and increase my effort.

Try harder is shown as the second ring from the outside and a critical spirit as the third ring from the outside.

The drive to try harder came as my **successes were challenged by others and beginning to fail (fourth circle in).** The world is full of controllers and sparks fly when they bump into each other. It can be a spouse, a child, a boss, a friend, a driver on the road or any other encounter. I recently read about a road rage incident in Nashville. A man in his 50s got out of his car at a redlight and started beating on the car of an 80 year-old couple. The elderly man in the car got out and the aggressive driver attacked him. Then, the elderly wife got out of the car to try and stop the fight when the aggressor picked her up and threw her into the lane of oncoming traffic! She was taken to the emergency room for severe head trauma. Two thoughts come to mind as I think about that story. One, what is wrong with the aggressive driver? His behavior was totally out of control and directed at a defenseless elderly couple. **Do you think his “feeler” was stuck?** The second thought is scarier to me. Had I been there, I’m pretty sure I would have intervened. My pulse increases and my anger rises thinking of that

poor couple. **I hope you see that traumas from the past can haunt you the rest of your life. To walk in freedom in an area of your life does not mean you never struggle there again.**

The fifth circle from the outside is promotion of self in the areas of self-indulgence, self-promotion, and self-defense. When you feel you are in control, everything depends on your effort. It truly is the spirit of an orphan versus the spirit of adoption as a son or daughter by the heavenly father. An orphan is totally dependent on his own effort for survival.

Worldly successes are the sixth circle from the outside. For me, those desires were born from an intense desire to be successful and significant. I tried harder than most people around me.

Finally, we get to the core of the problem with control and fear. We all have this innate fear of failing, not measuring up, or not having enough. God provided everything man needed in the garden. When sin entered the world, man must work by the sweat of his brow to produce food from the ground that was now cursed because of him. Relationship with God and the knowledge of Him, which is spiritual life, was lost. **Fear was the first emotion in the Bible.** After they sinned, Adam and Even hid from God because they were afraid. Fear comes in many shapes and colors. Fear of failure, fear of death, fear of being over powered, fear of not measuring up and a host of other fears are at the heart of our insecurity. This fear leads us to strongly desire to be in control.

The desire or need to be in control is a powerful force in our lives. Controlling people are acting out of fear. Controllers are some of the most unhappy people in the world. Think of someone in your life that has to be in control of everything. Do you like being around them? Probably not. The sad fact is we all struggle with this evil desire at some level. **Control is comprised of pride, rebellion and unbelief.** These three things create a very ugly reality in our lives. For a deeper understanding of control, see item 12 (fight the need to be in control) in the 15 Common Pitfalls study.

I have never met with any person that did not eventually realize that fear and the need or desire to be in control was at the center of their sin.

At this point, people usually take either an **aggressive** or **passive** approach to life. Some of the time it is a blending of the two. **I have shown a Sin Circle of Successes and a Sin Circle of Failures to help illustrate what that may look like in your life.** It is impossible to create a graph that captures everyone's sequence of thinking and actions, but the graphs are a good representation of many people I have talked to throughout the years. I encourage you to graph out your own sin circle.

The Faith Circle is in contrast to the Sin Circle. The center of the Faith Circle is obviously faith instead of fear. But that faith must include knowing, trusting and acting upon your beliefs. I explain the Faith Circle more in depth in the 2 Peter study. Somehow, we have believed that knowing about God is sufficient. It definitely isn't. The demons know about God but do not

trust or submit to him. You will not yield your life and the outcomes of your life to anyone or anything you do not trust.

The progression of faith shown in this graph is so beautiful. Trust leads to giving up control and living dependent on God; hope is increased; the pressure to perform is eliminated or reduced; peace and sense of abiding increases; the joy of the Lord becomes our strength and we have the ability to love others and freely give ourselves away as we have freely received. It is a world free from competition, performance, strife, envy and comparison. It is a life lived by the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

I have written another study showing the common pitfalls and trigger points I've seen in the people I've helped over the years. Their stories were always different, but their wrong thinking, bad behavior and negative emotions were very similar. I hope you find that and the Sin Circle helpful as a template to look at the patterns in your life. Use the blank circle provided and systematically walk through your own sin circle. Ask God to direct you. Talk to your spouse and your closest friends and ask them what they see in you. When I completed my sin circle, my wife and friends said the progression was accurate. To walk in freedom, we must be aware of how our thinking and past traumatic events shape our world and how we live in it.

5 Indicators or Trigger Points

The five indicators — or trigger points — come from my observations working with people and hearing their stories and struggles. The list is not scientific, but it has been a good guide in determining when someone may be losing control over their thoughts or behaviors.

Inability to Control Behaviors - Outbursts of aggressive behavior is usually what is seen in this area. Road rage is an excellent example. Someone cuts you off in traffic, and we are ready to explode. A question to always ask yourself: does my reaction match what happened to me? Am I overreacting? Do I have the ability to not respond aggressively in thought or action? If your answer is no, you need to work through your sin circle and determine the cause of your aggression.

Inability to Control Thoughts - This can be an extremely complex area to understand. For our purposes, let's keep it simple. Do you have constant thoughts that you do not want to think? Are they thoughts from God or Satan? Are they convicting or condemning? Determining the source of our thoughts is a great place to start. Any thought you are hearing that is a lie must be replaced with the truth.

Excessive Behavior - It is difficult to define excessive behavior, but it is easy to spot. Excessive behavior always pushes beyond normal limits; it's often hard for someone to explain why they do it. A person spending four hours a day working out would be excessive. But what about a girl who is extremely underweight, weighing only 100 pounds, and works out an hour a day? Is that excessive? I always ask people why are they doing what they are doing. If the 100-pound girl says she must exercise to not get fat, I know that is excessive behavior and would be curious to know her thoughts. Another indicator is to ask someone if they can stop the behavior. I have talked to numerous alcoholics that claim they are not addicted and could stop any time they wanted. My suggestion was always, well quit. Most could not because they did not realize they were out of control. Excessive behavior is more about the mental aspect of the behavior than the actual behavior.

Overreactions - The simple question here is does your reaction equal the triggering event? Let's go back to our road rage example. Suppose someone goes around you in the other lane while you are waiting in line. Then they cut in front of you as you reach your exit. Is that irritating? It is to me. Do I let them in or do I speed up as to not allow them in and risk an altercation? Do I yell at them? You know when you overreact to something. Suppose you leave the toilet seat up or squeeze the toothpaste from the top, and your wife screams at you. I have seen and heard this scene so many times I have lost count. Would you say that is a little bit of an overreaction? At that point, the answer is to go back and determine why the person reacted like that. What else is bothering them that culminated in this explosive reaction?

Negative Emotions - Anger, fear, anxiety, and other emotions have the potential to control our lives. Our emphasis is often on what needs to be done to eliminate the emotions. But the correct approach is to determine what is the cause of the emotion and begin to deal with that. As I show in the sin circle study, fear and the desire to be in control are at the heart and center of our negative emotions and behavior. Take the time to identify the source and how it affects you. Our thoughts and behaviors always begin with what we allow ourselves to think.