

Week 1 Demolishing Strongholds

Day 1

A Mighty Fortress

God amazed me with people's response to *Breaking Free: Making Liberty in Christ a Reality in Life*. The reception confirmed that Christians are struggling with powerful strongholds. Then God led me to write *Praying God's Word*. I have since been asked more questions about Christian liberty. So in this study I want to take some of the content from both *Breaking Free* and *Praying God's Word*, put them together, and help us apply those concepts to our lives.

What Is a Stronghold?

The term *stronghold* appears in the Old Testament almost 50 times but only once in the New Testament. We need to start with the Old both to lay a foundation and to see an important truth to guide us. The Israelites hid from their enemies in strongholds, meaning a "fortress with difficult access" (Judg. 6:2; 1 Sam. 23:14). David and others naturally compared their physical experiences with fortified strongholds to their spiritual experiences with the Lord.

Read Psalm 27:1 in the margin. Who or what does this passage claim as a stronghold?

- power
- riches
- the Lord
- sin

What did David conclude since the Lord was his stronghold?

- Nothing could physically injure him.
- He would never encounter difficulty.
- He did not have to be afraid.

Christ as our stronghold does not mean life will be easy or trouble free, but rejoice with me that we do not have to live in fear. God's

With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth

(Ps. 119:13).

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS

Day 1: A Mighty Fortress

Day 2: The Primary Battlefield

Day 3: What's Wrong with Human Effort?

Day 4: The Weapons of Our Warfare

Day 5: Keep Your Focus

*The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?*

(Ps. 27:1).

*“The Lord is my rock, my
fortress and my deliverer”
(2 Sam. 22:2).*

*The Lord will roar from
Zion and thunder from
Jerusalem; the earth and
the sky will tremble.
But the Lord will be a
refuge for his people,
a stronghold for the
people of Israel
(Joel 3:16).*

purposes may lead us to the path of suffering, but wherever He leads, we know He protects. He may protect from suffering or through suffering, but the more we know Him, the less we need to fear.

I love what one of my sources said about the Hebrew word for *fortress* in 2 Samuel 22:2. The word used is *misgav*, which means “refuge, stronghold.” It comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to be too strong for; to be lofty, be exalted; to lift high; to protect; to be kept safe.” What problems do you have that are too strong for God? Do you see Him as lofty and exalted?

Describe a time when God kept you safe.

Have you watched children playing keep-away? Or, if you love basketball as I do, think of a tall player keeping the ball out of an opponent’s grasp. That pictures the phrase “to lift high; to protect.”

Oh, beloved, let us never lose sight of the protecting stronghold of God. In this study we will confront satanic strongholds, but never forget they are lies. Only the Lord God is the truth. He is our greatest stronghold. How often do you suppose He lifts and protects us? Join me in praying that our precious Father will teach us to see His sheltering hand even when that hand takes us through difficult circumstances.

In this study we’re going to pray God’s Word. See page 9 for specific help on ways to pray God’s Word.

Start by writing your own prayer praising God for being our stronghold. Use the last words of Joel 3:16 (in the margin) to begin your prayer.

Father, thank You for always being my refuge and stronghold ...

How Do We Pray God's Word?

How do we learn to pray God's Word? Simply put, praying God's Word means speaking His language. It means talking to Him using His words. Don't waste time looking for a "formula" or "right" way to pray God's Word back to Him. This process comes from what is in your heart and on your mind.

To get you started on this road, I will share my approach. Whenever you read your Bible, watch for passages to talk with the Father about. Especially be on the alert for any Scripture that reflects the mind of Christ toward strongholds in your life. When you are struggling with a specific issue, use a Bible concordance or topical Bible resource to search for Scriptures pertaining to your need. You may not find a detailed description of your stronghold in Scripture, but you will definitely find verses that apply. Ask God to guide you (Ps. 25:4-5) and to open your eyes to His Word (Ps. 119:18). If you're not sure how to use Bible resources like a concordance, ask someone to help you.

When a passage speaks to you, it's time to pray God's Word. You can reword the passage into a prayer in any way God leads you. Here are some examples. I have referenced the passages involved.

1. Restate God's truth, affirming your faith:

Father, thank You that You are always good and that Your love endures forever (1 Chron. 16:34).

2. Talk to God about passages you don't understand:

Father Your word says, "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6). I know that I do not live up to that standard. Please help me understand and walk like Christ.

3. Ask God for what you need: *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"* (Mark 9:24).

4. Confess sin and ask God to change your life: *Father, I know that You hate pride and arrogance (Prov. 8:13); yet I see the ugly face of pride in my life. Teach me today to be compassionate and humble* (1 Pet. 3:8).

5. Praise God with your paraphrase of the words of Scripture: *I know, Lord, that You are indescribably great. You are greater than all the gods of this world* (Ps. 135:5).

I intend these examples to help get you started in praying God's Word. Please understand that your process won't and doesn't need to look like mine. I am only a fellow sojourner with you—not an expert. Your relationship with the Lord is unique. As you practice and become more comfortable with Scripture-prayer, your method will take on more of your personality and reflect more of your intimate relationship with the Lord.

As you get started, remember that through God's Word and prayer we are equipped with the divine weapons He has given us to demolish strongholds. The goal is abundant life, and God can liberate anyone!

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5, KJV).

False Strongholds

Unfortunately, God is not the only stronghold available to the children of Adam. Since sin entered the race, we have been mass-producing strongholds with the capable assistance of the evil one. Thus in Scripture we see the word *stronghold* applied both to substitutes for God and the bondage they produce.

The apostle Paul explained strongholds in 2 Corinthians 10:5 (in the margin). Basically, a stronghold is any argument or pretension that “sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” The wording in the *King James Version* (margin) draws a clearer image of a stronghold. A stronghold is anything that exalts itself in our minds, pretending to be bigger or more powerful than our God. It steals our focus and causes us to feel overpowered. Controlled. Mastered.

Whether our stronghold is an addiction, unforgiveness toward a person who has hurt us, or despair over a loss, it consumes so much of our emotional and mental energy that it strangles our abundant life. Our callings remain unfulfilled, and our believing lives become ineffective. Needless to say, these are the enemy’s precise goals.

Review the paragraph you just read. Underline the definition of a stronghold and circle statements that describe what a stronghold does.

Did you note that a stronghold is anything that exalts itself in our minds, pretending to be bigger or more powerful than our God? Among other things did you circle that a stronghold steals our focus?

The word *stronghold* appears only once in the New Testament, but other passages convey the same idea. From your Bible carefully read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. These will be our theme verses for the study. We will examine our weapons (v. 4) later. For now let’s consider verse 5. Paul says we are to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”

Satanic strongholds invade our lives whenever we allow something to appear bigger than God. As we end this first day of study, burn into your heart the fact that strongholds come from false ideas. Though we must deal with demonic strongholds, we can be encouraged when we remember that they are only lies and deceptions.

Day 2

The Primary Battlefield

When Satan wages war against us, the primary battlefield is the mind. Second Corinthians 10:5 states the goal of our warfare—to steal back our thought lives and instead take them captive to Christ. The enemy’s chief target is the mind because the most effective way to influence behavior is to influence thinking. Our minds are the control centers of our entire beings.

We can easily take a wrong turn on the path to freedom. See if this sounds familiar to you, because I sure know the territory. We struggle with a pattern of thoughts, words, or actions. We promise ourselves that we’ll never do it again. We even genuinely hate the behavior involved. Then we hear those hated words come out of our mouths or realize we’ve done it again, and we feel like pond scum.

In this process we often make a basic mistake. We assume our behavior is the battlefield and the goal is to change our actions.

Why do you think the battlefield is the mind rather than actions?

How do you react to the following statement?

We act out what we believe, not what we know.

agree disagree agree but can’t quite explain why

Print the following in your brain and underline it three times: *When the enemy wages war against us, the primary battlefield is the mind.* On a simple basis the battlefield is the mind because our minds control our actions. We decide what we do, but at a deeper level we act out what we really believe. The enemy knows far better than we do that nothing is bigger or more powerful than God, but if Satan can get you to believe his lies, he wins.

Disarming Power

Satan lost all rights to presume authority over a believer’s life at the cross (Col. 2:13-15). Christ disarmed the forces of evil. He stripped

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery

(Gal. 5:1).

When the enemy wages war against us, the primary battlefield is the mind.

*Though we live in the world,
we do not wage war as the
world does. The weapons we
fight with are not the weapons
of the world. On the contrary,
they have divine power to
demolish strongholds. We
demolish arguments and every
pretension that sets itself up
against the knowledge of
God, and we take captive
every thought to make it
obedient to Christ
(2 Cor. 10:3-5).*

*We do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize
with our weaknesses, but we
have one who has been
tempted in every way, just as
we are—yet was without sin
(Heb. 4:15).*

the powers and authorities just as a conquered army was stripped of weapons and armor and put to public shame. Paul wrote that God (in Christ) “made a public spectacle of them.” He exposed them to the universe as his captives. Satan is not only a defeated foe; he is a foe who has been publicly humiliated before the hosts of heaven.

Unfortunately, Satan does a remarkable job of making us believe he still has power. He is very good at his job because he’s had so much experience. But repeat after me: nothing is bigger or more powerful than God! Absolutely no thing! Not even the strongest addiction or overwhelming feeling of rage. One purpose of this book is to help you downsize anything that has a hold on you until you, in effect, have commanded it to bend the knee to the authority of Christ. Is this really possible? You bet it is!

In the margin circle the key words that appear more than once in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

Did you note the words *world*, *weapons*, and *demolish* each appear twice? We’ll specifically examine our weapons in day 4. The word “world” (NIV) or “flesh” (KJV) is *sarx*, and it means “flesh, body, the soft tissue of a creature, often in contrast to bone, ligament, or sinew; by extension human, humankind, with a focus on the fallen human nature.” Verse 3 says we live in the *sarx*. *Live* means “to walk (around); to live, conduct one’s life.” Since the fateful day when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, every human being but one has walked around in *sarx*—a sinful, fallen, human nature.

What does 1 John 1:8 tell us about who is without sin?

Hebrews 4:15 appears in the margin. Circle the basic fact that sets Jesus apart from all other human beings.

I don’t propose to understand the mysteries of the Trinity, the virgin birth, or how Jesus could combine being fully God and fully human, but I rejoice in the words “without sin.” Since the beginning of time, only one human being has lived free from the *sarx* nature. Paul calls Him the second Adam. “As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

God started a new lineage when Jesus became a human. At the cross Jesus made that lineage available to you and me.

Demolishing Power

Look back at the repeated words in 2 Corinthians 10. Paul twice used the word “demolish.” He used the word *kathairesis*, which is the combination of *kata*, meaning “against, contrary to, opposed,” and *haireomai*, meaning “to choose.”

What clue do you see in the meaning of Paul’s word, *kathairesis*, for how we destroy “arguments and pretension”?

How can we “tear down” lies and false arguments? The answer seems too simplistic. We must choose truth.

If the issue is truth versus lies, where is the battlefield?

- actions/behavior emotions/feelings thoughts/beliefs

Carefully understand that the apostle did not say choose a better course of action. He didn’t say choose to do right. We will find that strongholds have far too much fortification for those options. We will find liberty in another way. We must choose truth to tear down Satan’s lies. Tomorrow we will consider why human effort cannot accomplish that purpose.

Read Joshua 24:15 in the margin. Use Joshua’s words as the basis for your own written prayer.

Father, _____

How can we “tear down” lies and false arguments? We must choose truth.

“If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”

(Josh. 24:15).