

living  
free

LEARNING TO PRAY  
GOD'S WORD

BETH MOORE

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Nashville, Tennessee



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Beth Moore has written best-selling Bible studies on the patriarchs, Esther, Moses, Paul, Isaiah, Daniel, John, David, Jesus, and James. *Breaking Free*, *Praying God's Word*, and *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things* have all focused on the battle Satan is waging against Christians. *Believing God*, *Loving Well*, and *Living Beyond Yourself* have focused on how Christians can live triumphantly in today's world. *Stepping Up* explores worship and invites us to reach a new level of relationship and intimacy with God.

Beth and her husband, Keith, are devoted to the local church and have the privilege of attending Bayou City Fellowship in Houston, Texas, where their son-in-law Curtis Jones pastors. Beth believes that her calling is Bible literacy: guiding believers to love and live God's Word. Beth has a passion for Christ, a passion for Bible study, and a passion to see Christians living the lives Christ intended.

Beth loves the Lord, loves to laugh, and loves to be with His people. Her life is full of activity, but one commitment remains constant: counting all things but loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus, the Lord (see Phil. 3:8).



Much like Beth, Julie Woodruff, writer of the leader guide material, realized a call from God to ministry while she was a sophomore in college. Over the years that calling has taken the shape of youth ministry and now women's ministry.

Julie is Women's Minister at Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee. Julie's passion for women's ministry at Long Hollow is to help women find forgiveness and freedom in Christ, to be forged into the likeness of Christ, and to become a force for Christ in the world. She is a graduate of Louisiana College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

# INTRODUCTION

I recently had a conversation with a young woman named Sarah. She was studying *Breaking Free: The Journey, The Stories*. She was so frustrated with her Christian life, desperately wanting to please God, but she felt He was not pleased with her. Sarah told me that she had struggled with anorexia, so I asked if she is a perfectionist. Of course she said yes.

Sarah wants to be perfect for God. She thinks perfection means that she should never sin. When she does sin, she gets mad at herself for being so unspiritual. Sarah told me that for years she has gone through a cycle of commitment to God, failure, anger at herself, and despair. Not surprisingly, she has been baptized several times. She is obviously a sincere young woman, desperately seeking to please God while focused on her own sin and inadequacy. Sarah has never examined her basic beliefs about God and the Christian life. Like most others, she believes God can be pleased with human performance. Though her ideas are dressed up in biblical language, they are not unlike those of the worshipers of the Canaanite god of fire called Molech. The ancient worshipers thought they could please and manipulate God by burning their children as sacrifices. I am afraid many Sarahs think they can accomplish the same goals by burning themselves on some altar.

In this study I want to propose a different approach to all the Sarahs of this world. We are going to explore the somewhat-radical idea that we cannot please God by being perfect. Even if we achieved the impossible goal of human perfection, we would be not-an-inch closer to pleasing Him. What's more, we cannot please God by focusing on our sins and inadequacies. Won't work. Never happen. Never has. Never will. The only focus that will change our lives is a steady gaze Godward. The more we see Him, the less we will see ourselves. Conversely, the more we obsess over our sin, the more we crowd the Savior out of our sight.

So how do we develop a Godward focus for our lives? I want to propose a two-part answer. One part involves how we see the life

God desires for His children. We will explore five benefits God supplies us by His grace. We want to see these five benefits as snapshot-photographs of the life the Father has planned for us. We want to become so familiar with these benefits that we will come to desire to live the life pictured in the photos.

The second part of the answer involves prayer and Bible study. I believe the words of Psalm 107:20, "He sent forth his word and healed them." I believe a connection exists between God's Word, prayer, and a changed life. In this study we want to get practical—to the nuts and bolts—on the matter of pleasing God. How can we overcome persistent, defeating, devastating patterns of sin in our lives? How can we become so non-self-centered that we no longer focus on our own performance? How can we become so God-centered that we no longer want to pursue things that displease Him?

You will find this study linked to two of my previous works, *Praying God's Word* and *Breaking Free*. *Praying God's Word* seeks to encourage you to connect the two "sticks of dynamite" of prayer and Scripture. In this study I want to help you practice praying God's Word. If you have participated in the study called *Breaking Free*, you will find this study to be a follow-up. We want to get even more practical. If you have not done *Breaking Free*, I think you will find this a useful introduction to that longer Bible study. Either way, I hope you will join me on this journey. We want to grow in our calling: to be displays of His splendor.

NOTE: I have used several resources for study of Greek and Hebrew words. Definitions taken from *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* and the *Lexical Aids*<sup>1</sup> are enclosed in quotation marks with no reference. I have also used *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.<sup>2</sup> Words taken from *Strong's* are enclosed in quotation marks with the word *Strong's* in parentheses.

1. Spiros Zodhiates et al., eds., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992).

2. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Madison, NJ, 1970).



Week 1

# demolishing strongholds

## day one

### A MIGHTY FORTRESS

God amazed me with people's response to *Breaking Free: The Journey, The Stories*. 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.

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
- the Lord
- riches
- 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 purposes may lead us to the path of suffering, but wherever He leads,

*With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth (Ps. 119:13).*

*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).*

we know He protects. He may protect from suffering or through suffering, but the more we know Him, the less we need to fear.

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

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.

*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).*

**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.**

## 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!

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

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*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).*

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 two

### THE PRIMARY BATTLEFIELD

*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 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.

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

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.*

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> agree    | <input type="checkbox"/> agree but can't quite explain why |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |  |

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.

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 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.**

*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).*

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.

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?  
We must choose truth.

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
- thoughts/beliefs
- emotions/feelings

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.



## day three

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH HUMAN EFFORT?

*“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD (Isa. 55:8).*

A precious friend came through a time of disobedience, conviction, and repentance. She experienced both genuine brokenness and satanic accusation. After many weeks of deep depression she told me: “I thought I couldn’t come to God with this sin in my life. I thought I had to get myself out of the situation before God would have anything to do with me. I didn’t feel that He could love me because of what I had done.” I wanted to cry at her unbiblical view of God. She fell for the fundamental belief of all pharisees—that God’s love is based on our performance. On the contrary, God most wants us to come into His presence in the middle of our times of defeat.

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? (Gal. 3:1-2).*

#### God accepting us depends on ...?

- our obedience to His rules
- church attendance
- the sacrifice of His Son
- being baptized

We are so like the Galatians. We continue to believe that God loves conditionally. We cannot believe He operates differently than we do.

Isaiah 55:8 tells us we do not resemble God in our thoughts and ways. The word “thoughts” is *maschashava*. It means “thought, plan, scheme, plot, design.” The word “ways” is *derekh*. It means “way, path, route, road, journey; by extension: conduct, way of life.” If our thoughts, plans, schemes, and plots aren’t like God’s, we can bet our ways, paths, and routes won’t be either.

**Look at those definitions. Just how different do you think our thought process is from God’s?**



Human intuition points us to what just seems right, but the things of God are seldom intuitive. In fact, often you would be better to figure out what comes naturally and then do the opposite.

**What word do you find in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 that most nearly describes our human way of thinking? (If you need a hint, check 1 Corinthians 3:19.)**

Six times in 1 Corinthians Paul described human wisdom as foolishness. We get the English term *moron*, meaning “mentally defective” from the Greek term for *foolishness*. When we follow our instincts with God, we make morons of ourselves.

Let me show you a wonderful example. A vast army came against Judah. Messengers told king Jehoshaphat that the army was already at his southern border. Jehoshaphat consulted a prophet of God and then obeyed some rather strange battle plans.

**From your Bible read 2 Chronicles 20:20-30 and describe the king’s battle strategy.**

If our thoughts, plans, schemes, and plots aren’t like God’s, we can bet our ways, paths, and routes won’t be either.

Would you ever naturally arrive at sending the choir instead of the army out to fight a war? Don’t answer if you just had a fight with the minister of music!

**Can you cite some other examples when God acted in ways opposite to what humans naturally expect?**

I’d love to hear some of your answers. You could fill a book with examples from choosing a shepherd boy to be king to having the Son of God born in a stable. Without a doubt, one example excels them all. Paul calls it the foolishness of the cross.

Since the day sin damaged all areas of human life, we have been re-making the Creator in our own image. We think He acts, feels, and thinks the way we do. We have reality turned completely upside down. He intends for us to act, feel, and think the way He does.

Scripture presents the radical truth that God loves us completely, apart from our actions. Let me give you two examples.

*Whoever does not love  
does not know God,  
because God is love  
(1 John 4:8).*

First, if He must punish us because of our stubbornness, He does so in absolute love. All that God does is love because He is love (see 1 John 4:8 in the margin). You see, God loves even those who go into eternity rejecting Him. That does not question the reality of hell or the tragedy of those who go there. Possibly what will make hell so terrible is the full reality of having rejected God's love.

My second example of God's love relates to prayer. We naturally think if God answers a prayer or grants a miraculous healing, it is because He loves us. If we pray and the answer is no, we question God's love. But beloved, healing or answered prayer has absolutely nothing to do with whether He loves you. It has to do with God's purposes and plans for your life.

When circumstances tempt you to question God's love, learn to look to the right place. John 13:1 tells us: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."

### **Where did Jesus show us the full extent of His love?**

If your answer included the cross, you have it right. When you wonder about God's love, look to an old rugged cross. Don't look to circumstances. I hope you get my point today. In this matter of freedom we must abandon the belief in human effort. We can never please God by how hard we try. We can never work hard enough to

break free from the death grip of sin. A friend said it this way: “If the cross doesn’t make God happy, you’re not going to make God happy.”

Finally, put today’s truth in context. Does that mean we need to become spiritual couch potatoes? Should we just sit and wait for God to set us free? The answer is just as “absolutely not” as to the question of human effort. Hebrew 4:11 says, “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter” God’s rest. Second Peter 3:14 tells us to “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.” In both of those Scriptures the word for “effort” is *spoudazo*. It means “to be eager, make every effort, do one’s best.” As we continue we’re going to see how we can do our best to follow hard after Jesus Christ—without relying on human effort.

I told you God’s thoughts are not ours. Beloved, it is going to be so much fun learning to follow Him in His power instead of ours!

**End today’s study by praying through Psalm 86.**

## day four

### THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

*Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12).*

Second Corinthians 10:3-5 identifies four vital details about the weapons of our warfare.

1. They are not the weapons of the world.
2. They have divine power.
3. They are associated with the knowledge of God.
4. Their purpose in warfare is to take our thoughts captive.

Yesterday we saw that the human wisdom will never bring about the liberated life Christ intends for His children. Now let's consider the next detail: the weapons God provides have divine power.

**Read Ephesians 6:13-18. What offensive weapon does Paul mention?**

- |                                      |                                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> belt        | <input type="checkbox"/> shoes  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> shield      | <input type="checkbox"/> helmet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> breastplate | <input type="checkbox"/> sword  |

**How is the sword of the Spirit clearly identified?**

*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4).*

Paul listed the whole armor of God. Only one piece of the armor is actually a weapon. The figurative belt, shield, breastplate, shoes, and helmet are all defensive pieces of armor intended to keep us from harm. The sword of the Spirit, clearly identified as the Word of God, is the only offensive weapon listed in the whole armor of God.

**Look again at 2 Corinthians 10:4 in the margin. What does the plural word weapons suggest to you?**

If you said, “It suggests the existence of another offensive weapon,” we are on the same page. Second Corinthians 10:4 uses the plural, assuring us we have more than one offensive weapon for warfare. So we must ask what is the other primary weapon?

**In the Ephesians 6 passage, what immediately follows “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”?**

Perhaps additional weapons might be identified elsewhere, but the other primary weapon appears right after the words identifying the sword of the Spirit. The next verse says, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions.” I am convinced that the two major weapons with divine power in our warfare are the Word of God and Spirit-empowered prayer.

These two weapons have divine power (2 Cor. 10:4). The original Greek word for *power* is the adjective form of the term *dunamai*, meaning “to be able.” It is the achieving power of God applied. Perhaps this Greek term might pack a little more punch if we meditated on the fact that our English word *dynamite* comes from the same root word.

Stick with me here, because this is important. Virtually nothing we come against has more power than a stronghold. The very nature of the term tells us that whatever it is, it has a “stronghold” on us. Strongholds can’t be swept away with a spiritual broom. We can’t fuss at them and make them flee. We can’t ignore them until they disappear. Strongholds are broken one way only.

**What does 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 tell us must be done to strongholds?**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> nip them in the bud  | <input type="checkbox"/> demolish them                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> starve them to death | <input type="checkbox"/> grit your teeth and do better |

**The two major weapons with divine power in our warfare are the Word of God and Spirit-empowered prayer.**

*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. 10:4-5).*

Have you ever seen a building demolished? The most common way to demolish a modern “fortress” is by deliberately and strategically placing dynamite in the building and then detonating it. Imagine the demolition crew showing up at the building with sticks and stones. They could yell at that building with all their might and throw sticks and stones until they fainted from exhaustion, and it would still be standing. No one would doubt they had tried. They simply had the wrong tools. What they needed was dynamite.

**What tools have you used in the past to demolish your strongholds? Check any examples on my list and add your own.**

- trying harder
- punishing myself for failing to live up to God’s standards
- feeling depressed for days over an act of sin
- promising God I’ll do better
- others:

You and I are just about as effective as the crew with loud mouths, sticks, and stones when we try to break down our strongholds with carnal weapons like pure determination, secular psychology, and denial. Many of us have expended untold energy trying to topple these strongholds on our own, but they won’t fall, will they? That’s because they must be demolished.

God has handed us two sticks of dynamite with which to demolish our strongholds: His Word and prayer. What is more powerful than two sticks of dynamite placed in separate locations? Two strapped together. That’s what our study is all about: taking our two primary sticks of dynamite—prayer and the Word—strapping them together, and igniting them with faith in what God says He can do. Hallelujah! I’m getting excited just thinking about it!

The ultimate goal God has for us is not power but personal intimacy with Him.

What makes these two sticks of dynamite so powerfully effective when strapped together? Let’s consider the stick of prayer first. Prayer keeps us in constant communion with God, which is the goal of our entire believing lives. Prayerless lives are powerless lives, and

prayerful lives are powerful lives; but, believe it or not, the ultimate goal God has for us is not power but personal intimacy with Him.

**How is intimacy with God different from the goal of being good enough to be acceptable to God?**

Yes, God wants to bring us healing, but more than anything, He wants us to know our Healer. Yes, He wants to give us resurrection life, but more than that, He wants us to know the Resurrection and the Life. Please let this truth sink in deeply. It is never the will of God for warfare to become our focus. The fastest way to lose our balance in warfare is to rebuke the devil more than we relate to God. The primary strength we have in warfare is godliness, which is achieved only through intimacy with God. God insists on prayer because His chief objective is to keep us connected entirely to Him.

**Review the paragraph above. What develops godliness in a believer?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a regular plan of discipline | <input type="checkbox"/> intimacy with God        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> keeping rules                | <input type="checkbox"/> believing right doctrine |

*It is never the will of God for warfare to become our focus. The fastest way to lose our balance in warfare is to rebuke the devil more than we relate to God.*

We will never win any spiritual battle without prayer, but when the heat of battle has momentarily cooled, the plunder from the battle is a far greater intimacy with God. Prayer is not the means to an end. In so many ways, it is the end itself.

What makes the Word such a powerful stick of dynamite to demolish strongholds? Look once again at 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Our objectives are to cast down anything that exalts itself in our thought lives and to take our thoughts captive to Christ.

**What do you think Scripture means by taking “captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”?**

This is the key I finally recognized after many months of studying these verses. We take our thoughts captive, making them obedient to Christ, every time we choose to think Christ's thoughts about any situation or stronghold instead of Satan's or our own.

### Where do we find Christ's thoughts?

I finally learned that the way to make our exalted, overpowering thoughts bow down in obedience to Jesus Christ is to choose to think His thoughts about the matter rather than our own or those influenced by the enemy. The Word of God reveals Christ's thoughts to us.

In my book *Praying God's Word*, I share exactly how I began to think God's thoughts over controlling strongholds in my life. In this study I want to bring together the practice of praying God's Word with the five key benefits from *Breaking Free: The Journey, The Stories*. Then I want to help you use Scripture and prayer so that God can powerfully redirect your life.

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:2).*

In praying Scripture, I not only find myself in intimate communication with God, but my mind is also being retrained, or renewed (Rom. 12:2), to think *His* thoughts about my situation rather than mine. Ultimately, He resumes His proper place in my thought life as huge and indomitable, and my obstacle shrinks. This approach has worked powerfully every time I've applied it. It takes belief, diligence, and time, but the effects are liberating and eternal.

**Write a prayer based on Psalm 18:31-35.**

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## day five

### KEEP YOUR FOCUS

I have a wonderful and a terrible truth for you. We become like the object of our focus. If our focus is on our needs, we become more needy. If our focus is on the harm others have done to us, we become harmful and angry people. If our focus is on material things, we become grasping and greedy. And, praise God, if our focus is on Christ, we become more and more like Him.

*Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer (2 Tim. 2:3-4).*

**What was the apostle Paul's focus, according to Philippians 3:13-14?**

Paul continually emphasized this need for focus. He warned of the dangers of entanglements in 2 Timothy 2:3-4. He declared, “to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

**On what does Philippians 4:8 tell us to focus?**

Don't mistake Paul's words to be Pollyanna-ish. He's not pushing the power of positive thinking—that if you think about good things, you'll become good. For Paul true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and excellent are concepts found only in Jesus. He could have said, “Think about Jesus.”

**What does Hebrews 2:1 tell us to do with the things we have heard (about Jesus)?**

**In Hebrews 12:2, to whom does the writer encourage us to look?**

Peter sends the same signal in 1 Peter 3:15: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (NKJV). The word *sanctify* means “to set apart, make holy; this can mean active dedication and service to God or the act of regarding or honoring as holy.” We sanctify whatever we set apart from the common. Again Peter told us to be “looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God ... looking for new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet. 3:12-13, NASB).

**Describe what specific things you can do to “fix [your] eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of [your] faith” and to “sanctify [set apart as holy] the Lord God” in your life.**

Remember our definition of a stronghold—anything that exalts itself in our minds, pretending to be bigger or more powerful than our God. To sanctify Christ certainly includes recognizing His absolute uniqueness. Nothing even comes close to challenging Him in power.

**In what areas of your life do you need God’s power?**

*He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many (2 Cor. 1:10-11).*

We can easily drift from a pure focus on Jesus. Two of the easiest ways are to become focused on the problems of others or to focus on Satan himself.

Sometimes Satan successfully schemes to keep us in bondage by fueling our focus on others’ strongholds rather than our own. We have such a tendency to see the speck in the other person’s eye when a log is lodged deeply in ours. I am convinced that as a general rule, strongholds are almost always broken between God and the individual captive. As 2 Corinthians 1:10-11 tells us, we can help others with our prayers, but we cannot fight their battles for them.

We can also become unbalanced in our approach to warfare and strongholds by becoming obsessed with Satan. His utmost goal is to be worshiped (Isa. 14:12-17). Much of worship is focus. Satan wins a

tremendous victory and derives much satisfaction when he can get us to focus more on him than on God. That's why this study seeks to center on our communication with God through prayer and His Word far more than give directives on what to say to the devil.

### How did Jesus consistently respond to Satan (Matt. 4:1-11)?

Christ set a perfect example for us. We most effectively rebuke Satan when we take our stand in the Word of God. If we know God's Word and how to pray the mind of Christ in a matter, we will be equipped with specific Scriptures when the need arises to face our foe and verbally rebuke him.

The most effective way to live in victory over the devil is to walk in righteousness with God. Strongholds are thoughts taken captive to anything but Christ. If Satan can take our thoughts captive by leading us to focus on battling him, he's successfully built another stronghold.

I often ask God to keep me balanced in the whole counsel of His Word and to help me discern when I'm getting off track. Let's all stay balanced in God's Word. We may be at war with a powerful, unseen enemy, but we are at peace with the Lord God omnipotent, and He still reigns! Now let's consider one last general issue that keeps us focused on Christ.

Remember that God is far more interested in our relationship with the Deliverer than our being delivered. Sometimes the overwhelming power of a stronghold may be instantly broken, but the renewing of our minds takes a lifetime. We demolish strongholds when we make our minds captive to Christ. Let's face it, some holds in our lives are simply stronger than others. If God is getting our full cooperation, the length of the process or the intensity of the struggle is really up to Him. You see, it all depends on His objective. I am certainly no expert, but after about 18 months of researching the biblical topic of strongholds and the Christian, I've come to believe

**We demolish strongholds when we make our minds captive to Christ.**

that God generally prioritizes one of two objectives: showing us His power or teaching us that He is all we need.

**In the following story underline the part showing God's supremacy and circle the part showing His sufficiency.**

I have a sister in Christ whom God set free from an addiction to both alcohol and tobacco years ago. Instantaneously, God broke the stronghold of addiction to tobacco and renewed her mind so that she had no desire whatsoever to smoke. In contrast, she makes the choice to walk in freedom over alcohol addiction almost every day of her life. She still has the desire to drink, although she has lived in victory for many years.

From which stronghold did God set her free? Both! Neither area is controlling her. The instantaneous release from tobacco addiction taught her God's dominion over all things. She saw that nothing is impossible for God. She beheld His absolute supremacy.

However, if God had broken her free of every stronghold that easily and rapidly, she would never have learned to depend on Him. The lingering desire to drink, coupled with an exceeding desire to overcome, has challenged her to choose the authority and power of Christ every single day. In His sovereign wisdom God teaches His strength in her weakness. She has learned God's sufficiency.

The same will probably be true for you and me. Some strongholds will never threaten to take our minds captive again. Others may contest their defeat and demand a rematch every day. Either way God has equipped us to overcome. We are wise not to judge others when they struggle to be free and seem to relapse over and over for a while. None of us is beyond facing the same challenge. Matthew 7:1-2 offers wise counsel when we are tempted to judge a person for his or her inability to attain immediate and lasting victory over a stronghold: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Renewing the mind means learning to think new thoughts. That can take some time ... but let's not waste another minute of it, OK? It's time to start igniting some dynamite!

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