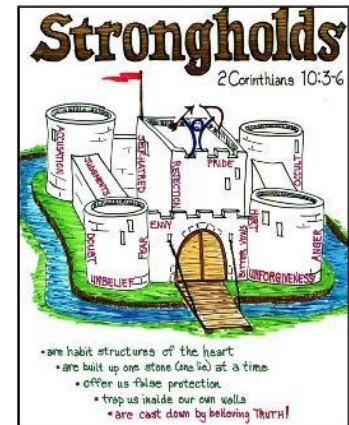


Lesson 11: Spiritual Strongholds

Healing Streams Ministry, Savannah, GA. All scriptures are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

Up to now we have been laying a foundation for understanding our emotional and spiritual life. We have seen the connection between stress and disease and between our negative emotions and what the Bible calls sins. Then we looked at the pathway of temptation into sin coming from spiritual darkness and the way out that separates us from sin and releases us to enter into God's kingdom. Finally, we focused upon the all important role of image bearing and how the power of beholding can uplift us or cast us down according to the image of God and of self that we carry deep within our hearts. **Now, we are entering into the real "battlefield"** of the course! This is the section where we will explore the major emotional strongholds that carry us away from the peace of Christ and all too often hold us captive to stress (as anxiety) or distress (as depression). The strongholds we will explore are generational sin, unbelief, accusation, bitterness, trauma, rejection, self-rejection, envy/jealousy, the occult, fear and addictions. That's quite a list! But first we will have to study what strongholds are, how they are formed and how they can be brought down.¹



Strongholds

What are strongholds? Jesus is our true stronghold, the One that we run to when threatened by sin or danger. David couldn't say enough about trusting the Lord as His Protector.

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalm 18:2

But counterfeit strongholds are un-surrendered, un-healed or un-crucified areas of the old nature or self life. They rise up and resist the Spirit-given life (the life of the Spirit, Christ's life, or new creation life in us). Self protectiveness built them and maintains them—aided by the lies and temptations of the enemy. **We are to resist them by pulling them down.** Like David we don't need self-protection any longer—we have the Lord to protect us!

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 WEB

Strongholds are habit structures of thought. When we ask Jesus into our life, God changes our heart, but we have to change our habits by working with the truth and grace He supplies. Habits are thoughts or actions repeated so often over time that no conscious thought is required for them to take place again. Thoughts begins as seeds, but if unchecked, can become trees firmly rooted (He 12:15). Strongholds are built upon seemingly apparent and self-evident truths which are actually distortions of eternal truth. Our continuing agreement with them keeps them built up and strengthened. **Stronghold thinking is stinking thinking!**²

The stronghold is fortified by false beliefs which we have to pull down by carrying those thoughts captive to Christ. The hidden lie has to be exposed by the truth of God's Word as the Spirit gives revelation. This requires some diligence, especially in the beginning.

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23 WEB

In the stronghold we encounter the negative power of the self life:

We say: *I feel it so strongly; it feels like it must be true.*

We need to wake up and realize that our feelings are lying to us. In fact the more powerful the negative feeling is, the greater the lie it is pressing upon us. (See Bonus Lesson #1).

We say: *I just don't see how God's truth can be right about this situation.*

We need to realize in advance that in certain situations our understanding is going to be worthless to us. His ways really are higher than our ways and His thoughts really are higher than ours. We are admonished in Proverbs to get understanding, but not to lean upon it. Cast down what you think you know if it is keeping you from trusting. You can at least understand this: He loves you and would never fail you.

A stronghold is like a medieval fortress. The unhealed wounds of traumatic events often cause strongholds to form. Usually they have been built stone by stone (thought by thought) over a long period of time—so long that we have forgotten that we ever believed or felt anything different, or that life ever was different than how the stronghold now makes it seem. In that area of experience, we have come to see life from the perspective of the stronghold. Like the keep of a medieval castle it is well fortified. ***We feel protected by believing it***, but it keeps us a prisoner on the inside—held captive by our own walls. Such walls also keep others from leading us out.



If you can't just say no to the flesh, you are dealing with a stronghold. Another way of picturing these strongholds of the flesh is like having your arm gripped by someone dragging you along with them against your will. The enemy's gains a strong hold upon our flesh in areas where we have repeatedly given our beliefs and actions over to his twisted ways.

Strongholds are not evil spirits. Strongholds are fortresses of thought built up within our flesh which can be used by the enemy to harass and oppress us. A stronghold may be occupied or unoccupied—this is by no means easy to discern. Try to attack someone else's stronghold head on and it will seem well occupied and well defended against all the reasons you bring! On the other hand, if a spirit is oppressing you through a stronghold you may sense the power of the negative feelings it stirs up as well as by its hold over you. Evil spirits are very stubborn to give way to truth and/or to the exercise of our wills to resist them. Fortunately, it is not necessary to know if a spirit is oppressing you. Let the Holy Spirit show you what sins to confess and what false beliefs to renounce, then choose to submit to God and His Truth. Genuine submission to God undercuts the hold that any evil spirits may have upon you—and with some determined rebuking, they have to flee (Jas 4:7-8).

*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds...
2 Corinthians 10:4*

Strongholds take advantage of 4 great lies of the enemy³

- I must meet certain standards in order to feel good about myself.
- I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself.
- Those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.
- I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.

The “4 A's” describe performance orientation coming out of these lies:

Because of a lack of Affection (or Attention) I sought Achievements in order to gain Approval so that I could feel Accepted. The answer in Christ: Now I can rest secure at last in the Father's unending acceptance, affection and approval for me.



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How are strongholds brought down? Bringing down strongholds and carrying their “high” thoughts captive to Christ is primarily a truth encounter on our part. We cast down our understanding and break agreement with our feelings. As we choose by an act of our will to agree with the truth (that the enemy’s stronghold is a lie and the Word is the truth), then the Holy Spirit strengthens us and raises us by the power of God. Confessing truth and renouncing the lies need to be done by the one seeking freedom—thought by thought, “stone by stone.”

How the process of dismantling a stronghold works. The things that bring strongholds down are the very things that would have kept them from forming in the first place—if we had had sufficient understanding of how to apply the truth of God’s Word to the hurtful situation or wrong desire. So now in the present moment when new situations trigger the stronghold, we can do under the Spirit’s power what we didn’t do then, and begin taking the stronghold down one victory at a time.

Either we will carry wrong thoughts captive, or they will carry us captive to do their will. **The Lord’s servant must not quarrel, but be gentle towards all, able to teach, patient, in gentleness correcting those who oppose him: perhaps God may give them repentance leading to a full knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the devil’s snare, having been taken captive by him to his will.** 2 Timothy 2:24-26 WEB

If we have no knowledge (discernment) the un-recognized thoughts have greater power. **“Therefore my people go into captivity for lack of knowledge.”** Isaiah 5:13 WEB

Recognizing stronghold thinking and being willing to challenge it with the truths of God’s Word, gives us the weapon needed for victory. Truth is liberating—if you truly believe it. **So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** John 8:31-32

End notes for Strongholds

1. For emotional blocks as “strongholds”: Teaching and insights from Be In Health® teaching and materials, Dr. Henry W. Wright, Thomaston, Georgia, seminar notes, October 2000.
2. For strongholds as “habit structures of thought”: Jack Frost, Shiloh Place Min., Myrtle Beach, SC, cassette teaching.
3. The “four lies”: Robert McGee, *Search for Significance*, Rapha teaching series on cassette.

Notes/Journal



Exercise



A test to reveal the power of hidden strongholds over your feelings. Can you whole-heartedly and joyfully affirm the following? Remember how you think and feel when you are down.

- 1) There have been no unforgivable sins done by me or weaknesses in me—I do not cringe or feel shame at the remembrance of anything I have ever said or done.



2) There have been no unredeemable past or present losses or failings—I am entirely OK with all that has happened to me and trust great good to come from all of my past.

3) God the Father is always:

- Loving me with pure, unbounded affection—even in my worst moments.
- Forgiving me completely—not holding any of my sins against me.
- Eagerly helping me—with His love and wisdom guiding all He sends or allows.

If you cannot agree from the depth of your emotions with these truths (on your “bad” days), then strongholds may be present which are binding negative feelings to you. List what you discovered and try to understand the stronghold thinking your feelings represent.

Negative feeling

Stronghold thinking

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Discussion Questions



Ask the group to consider examples of stronghold thinking in our culture. (For example: people from cults who come to your door, atheistic evolutionary advocates, extreme positions in favor of abortion.) Have they ever been able to change anyone’s mind on these subjects? What do we end up doing—after first getting frustrated and angry of course!—and what works?

Now ask them to consider the kinds of strongholds that individuals they have met have had—no examples of anyone present or known to the group, please. This is not for gossip, but for understanding the dynamic. What was it like trying to talk past the stronghold? What worked? Did anything work?

Then ask them to offer up (if they are willing) an example of a stronghold (not shameful, painful, or embarrassing) in their own emotional life. Not for therapy or counsel, but for prayer. Then pray for all that have been mentioned for the Lord to go to work to pull those strongholds down. Then let each one *on their own* give special attention to the relevant stronghold teachings that are scheduled to come up in the series—no back seat drivers!

Main Points



- Strongholds are those areas of our fallen nature that still have power over us.
- Unhealed traumas are a breeding ground for strongholds. So is generational sin.
- Strongholds are rooted in lies that seem self-evidently true.
- Strongholds are habit patterns of thought that require no conscious effort to believe.
- If we don’t carry the thoughts of strongholds captive, they will hold us captive.
- Pulling down strongholds is a truth encounter, not a will power contest.

Digging Deeper



How basic discipleship and inner healing restrain strongholds.

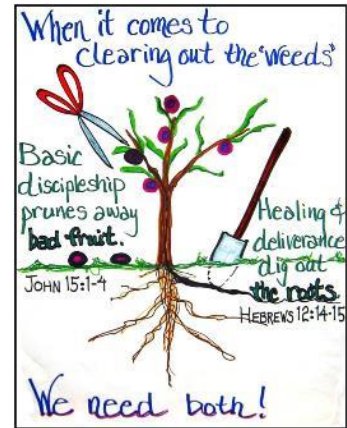


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Basic discipleship is the part we play in doing our best to trust and obey with the faith and self-discipline that we have available to us. The disciplines act as a restraint upon the power of temptations and of our fallen nature with its strongholds. If you don't think you have much discipline or that trying to restrain the flesh isn't working, just abandon the discipline and/or faith you still have left to you and see what happens and how disastrous that can be. We can't always make things better in a trial, but we certainly can make it worse—in a heartbeat! So what are the basic disciplines? Regular prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship and service to others combined with seeking to trust and obey the Lord's leadings.

Inner healing gets at the root issues that caused strongholds to form in the first place. Where there is bad fruit, there is almost always a root issue to deal with. Inner healing removes or breaks the power of temptations and of our fallen nature by bringing release from the pain and/or ungodly beliefs trapped inside due to past traumatic events. For examples of the ways the Lord heals trauma see Lesson 16.



Sword and Shield



Scriptures that connect victory over strongholds to the battle for truth.

Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge...
Isaiah 5:13

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
John 8:31-32

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:2

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.
2 Timothy 2:24-26

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.
Hebrews 4:12, 14

Prayer Focus



Even very long journeys begin with a single first step in the right direction. Perhaps by now you have caught a glimpse of the Kingdom with its glorious possibilities of life and it seems a far distant thing from the way your life has been. Perhaps you have caught sight of a stronghold or two that are holding you captive to stress of one kind or another. Perhaps it is time to take that first good step to launch a journey into the heart of God.



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Father, I have lived inside the walls of my strongholds for so long they have become a part of me. I hardly know how to begin taking them down. But I do want to find out what life in Your Kingdom is like on the other side of these walls—that childlike life of simplicity and trust. So, I ask you to help me take all of my strongholds down stone by stone, untruth by untruth, and rebuild the godly walls of love, mercy, faith and grace around the renewed heart you are giving me through Jesus Christ my Lord. What I can't tear down, will You? Come charge my walls! Send, allow, withhold—do whatever it takes so that our two hearts can meet and live as one—in this life.



Renunciations and Affirmations

Confess/renounce previous agreements with untruth; confess/believe Truth as your new Way of life.

In the grip of the stronghold we exert our will to choose to believe truth. Consider the ways you have often felt when a powerful negative emotion has taken you captive. Then pray:

I renounce the lies my feelings and inner thoughts press upon me.

I cast down my understanding, and choose to trust God's wisdom and His ways.

I choose by an act of my will to believe God's Word and to obey Jesus by _____.

Putting Feet to Your Prayers/Stretch Yourself!

Negative emotions lie to us and misdirect us—why would an emotion do that? From the perspective of spiritual warfare, the negative emotion is like a glove; the evil spirit is like an invisible hand manipulating the glove. Let's take the gloves off and expose this deception!

- 1) The negative emotion wants to convince you that it has a right to stay.
- 2) It wants to focus you on something or someone else as the problem for why you are stuck with that emotion. It never says: "I'm the problem. Just get rid of me!"
- 3) It wants to make you think it is up to you to do something about it. It pressures you to be your own savior.
- 4) It wants to get others to agree with it—that it has a right to be in you and should be in you until that problem "out there" is fixed.

Consider: anger with God, hopelessness, fear, self-hatred, and bitterness with others.



Some fruitful questions to ask within the stronghold. As you ask them, wait upon the Lord to see or hear what He may show you. Then pray to believe the truth that sets them to flight.

Lord, what am I really angry about? Why do I feel so guilty and ashamed?

Help me fully forgive others and fully receive Your forgiveness.

What am I really afraid of?

Help me match Your truth to my deepest fear until the fear is released.



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