

Bible Study: Deepening Your Prayer Life, Approach God with Boldness, Charles Stanley

Lesson 4: The Warfare of Prayer

Lesson Objectives: What is a satanic stronghold?

Growing: What steps can I take to identify and remove any satanic strongholds in my life?

Imagine the year is 1944. You are a soldier in the U.S. Army, and you are on an amphibious vessel about to land at Omaha Beach in Normandy. (Historians will later refer to the battle as D-Day.) Picture yourself on that boat with your fellow soldiers. You turn to the man near you and say, “I hear this battle could turn the tide of the whole war.”

To your surprise, the soldier looks back at you and asks, “What war?” You decide to humor the fellow, so you say, “The war we’re fighting against the Nazis.” The man has a puzzled expression on his face. “What is a Nazi?” he asks you.

I would guess this poor soldier would be in for a rather nasty surprise. If you are in a war, but you don’t realize you are in a war, it is quite likely that you are going to get wounded. If you are in a war and don’t know who your enemy is, you are working at a terrible disadvantage. And if the enemy has a base right in your front door, and you are not even aware that it is there, you are bound to be defeated.

Unfortunately, this is the situation many of us in the church are dealing with today. We are in a war against a serious enemy – a deadly enemy – yet many of us don’t realize it. And even if we do understand it intellectually, we don’t *live* as if we are in the midst of a war. Again, as the apostle Paul explained, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

There is one aspect of spiritual warfare in the body of Christ that is especially misunderstood today – or even ignored. This is what Paul referred to as “strongholds”. Here is what he said in another letter: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). The Greek word Paul uses for *stronghold* in this verse describes a fortified castle. Paul is not talking about *physical* castles but *rather* spiritual

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fortifications that exist in our lives. A stronghold is a spiritual power base occupied by our enemy that has the potential to be incredibly destructive.

In this session, we will explore the reality of these strongholds, including how they impact our prayer lives and how we can use prayer as a weapon to tear them down. As we do, we will address: (1) what Stan's designs are for these strongholds, (2) how strongholds develop in our lives, and (3) how we can in turn demolish these strongholds.

1. How would you summarize what you have been taught about spiritual warfare?

2. Why do you think many believers in the church today are unaware that a spiritual battle – such as the one Paul describes in Ephesians 6:10-20 is taking place?

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SATAN'S DESIGN FOR STRONGHOLDS

Satan and his forces are the source of these spiritual strongholds. But what is Satan's ultimate objective for building and maintaining a stronghold in your life? On the surface, his motivation is simple: he wants to cause you harm and distract you from God's purposes and plans. But there are also some specific strategies that Satan has in mind when he spots a weakness in your life and attempts to build a stronghold on that point.

First, Satan's design is to divide your mind. If Satan harasses you in a particular area or discovers some area of weakness in which he can work, it will divide your thoughts. Let's say, for example, that you have a stronghold of jealousy. Maybe there is somebody in your life for whom Satan has warped your attitude. You think that person is better than you are and that he or she is trying to get the best of you. Satan can use that stronghold to divide your mind. You will be thinking about something else and all of a sudden that person will pop in your thoughts. It can happen continually. Satan will harass you by regularly whispering, "That person is better. That person is more successful. That person is conspiring behind your back."

Second, Satan's design is to discourage you. The enemy will constantly remind you of your failures and your mistakes – especially your sins. "Look," he will say to you, "you've gone and done it again. How could God love someone who does that? Don't you know that God is ashamed of you? Don't you know God is disappointed with you?" If you don't understand what is happening, you will start agreeing with the enemy's lies. You will start to believe what Satan says about you over what God says about you. It will cause discouragement.

Finally, Satan's design is to disillusion you. Once you are feeling distracted and discouraged, he will keep attacking you in that same place again and again. After all, why would he stop when it works so well? His goal is to get you to think, "I don't believe this Christian life works. I've confessed my sin, I've repented, I've read the Bible, I've been to revival meetings, I've been to seminars, I've been to Bible conferences, I've been to Bible studies, I've been to prayer groups – but I'm still dealing with the same old problems, and nothing seems to work."

It is easy to get disillusioned by the enemy's constant attacks and disillusioned by your own sense of failure. Just think of how many times you have prayed, "God, I promise on a stack of Bibles that I will not do this anymore!" How long did that

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HOW STRONGHOLDS DEVELOP

The first thing to know about strongholds is that they can happen both *involuntarily* and *voluntarily*. An involuntary stronghold can develop and take hold as a result of something that is programmed into your thinking by others. It is not your choice. This typically happens during your younger years. The people you believe or respect feed false ideas or false beliefs into your mind... and eventually they take root and develop into a power base for the enemy.

For example, let's say you grew up in a home where your parents didn't get along, your brothers and sisters fought all the time, and as a result you were the object of continuous criticism. You endured that criticism until you became an adult – but it affected you. It impacted you. You often felt you were no good, that you would never succeed at life, and that you would never get the kinds of breaks other people enjoyed. This represents an area of weakness, and Satan will take advantage of it. Satan will still use those lies that other people spoke into your life as footholds of self-doubt to build a stronghold of accusation in your mind.

Voluntary strongholds are different, because they are the result of your own choices – the result of your sins. Every stronghold begins with a *thought*. It may be a thought about greed, jealousy, lust, or anything else... but it always begins with a thought. "I want that. I deserve that. I should have that." The thought then moves to *consideration*. Once the thought enters your mind, you begin to dwell on it. You begin to look at all the aspects of it, just like you might turn a jewel round and round in your fingers to so see all the different facets. You allow that thought to turn in your mind, as if you are chewing on it and savoring it.

Next, this consideration becomes an *attitude*. The more you think about something, the more you are prone to start thinking in that direction. Soon it becomes an attitude – a part of your mindset and your thought patterns – and then it turns into an *action*. After all, if you think about something long enough and you lean in that direction long enough – you are eventually going to do something about it. The attitude is going to become an action.

When this action is repeated again and again, it transforms into a *habit*. It becomes something you turn to regularly. Something you almost feel as if you can't live without. Finally, the habit becomes a *stronghold*. It becomes a fortification of Satan in your own mind and heart – a place from which he can attack you with impunity.

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- 5. As you look back on your life, are there any messages or labels that have “stuck” after being spoken into your life by others? How do these represent strongholds?**

- 6. How do you react to this six-step process of how voluntary strongholds develop? Do the steps ring true for you? Explain.**

IDENTIFYING STRONGHOLDS

At this point in the study, you might be asking, “Do I have one of these strongholds in my life?” There are several ways you can determine if any strongholds exist.

First, think of any area or place in your life about which you make these statements: “I don’t know why I keep doing that. I don’t know why I keep thinking that. I don’t know why I can’t gain any ground in this area.” If so, you have identified a stronghold. Second, look for anything you consistently do in excess or take to excess. This could be eating, seeking pleasure, gossiping, judging others, or stockpiling money (which is greed). Anything you do in excess is like a neon sign flashing, “stronghold!”

Prayer can help you to identify strongholds. It’s best if you regularly take moments throughout the day to quiet yourself before God and seek His guidance. Just simply ask Him, “Lord, where do you see strongholds in my life? What are the areas where I keep doing things and I don’t understand why? Where am I taking things to excess?”

Prayer is a critical tool for identifying strongholds. And, as we will see next, prayer is a critical tool for *demolishing* strongholds.

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7. What is an area (or areas) of life where you say, “I don’t understand why I do that?”

8. Where do you see yourself regularly struggling with taking things to excess?

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DEMOLISHING STRONGHOLDS

So, how do you eliminate strongholds in your life? This is the key question that you need to be asking. I believe the answer can be found in Paul's words recorded in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

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.

The weapons you use to attack and destroy the strongholds in your life are *divine* weapons. They are supernatural weapons. And it all starts with prayer. Talk about deepening your prayer life! There are not many experiences with prayer that can compare with attacking the enemy head on and destroying his fortified power bases.

To begin, ***familiarize yourself with Scriptures***. Specifically, seek out those passages that address strongholds you want to pull down. For example, if your stronghold is lust, memorize passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:18: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." If your stronghold involves jealousy or hatred or bitterness, find Scripture passages that address those themes. When you do, God will bring those Scriptures to mind as you pray. They will be powerful weapons both to defend against temptation and as you go on the attack.

Second, pray in the name of Jesus. Satan cannot tolerate our Savior's name. It is the "name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). When Peter and John were confronted by the beggar at the gate of the temple, Peter told him, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). If you want to destroy the strongholds in your life, you need to approach the demolition process through the authority of Jesus Christ and in the power of His name.

Third, rely on the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross. Satan will not give up his strongholds easily. He will fight and do whatever he can to hold on to them. But the Bible states that Satan will be overcome "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11).

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In the book of Exodus, the angel of death came like a fog moving over the nation of Egypt. The firstborn was killed wherever the lamb's blood did not appear on the door. The blood of Jesus has always been a source of protection for God's people. Not only that, but Jesus' blood is also your means of access to the throne of God. You not only pray in the *name* of Jesus but also under the *protection* and *power* of His blood that was shed on the cross.

The final weapon in demolishing strongholds is the Holy Spirit. According to 1 John 4:4, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Who is the "He" inside you? The Holy Spirit. He carries the power you need. He is your advocate and will give you the firepower to not only identify the strongholds in our lives but also tear them down.

As you tear down these strongholds, it is important for you to be honest about what you are doing. Call the stronghold by name. Acknowledge you are in the middle of spiritual warfare. Be honest about what your stronghold is and how it developed in your life. Approach this process under the umbrella of faith. It is not God's will for Satan to maintain strongholds in your life – and you need to *believe* it is not. It is the will of God for you to have victory over the darkness in your spiritual life. It is the will of God for any and all strongholds in your mind and heart to be torn down, smashed, and demolished once and for all.

Believe that truth in faith. Attack those strongholds with the supernatural weapons you have been given. And you will see these strongholds begin to fall.

9. How would you describe your experiences with using these weapons in the past?

10. On a practical level, what does it look like to access the protection of Jesus' blood and the power of the Holy Spirit?

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TODAY AND TOMORROW

Today: I have access to the weapons I need for tearing down any and all strongholds in my life.

Tomorrow: I will make it a priority to work in God's power to prevent new strongholds from developing in the months and years to come.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we thank You and praise You that you have not left us susceptible to Satan's tricks – his snares, his manipulations, his conniving – but You have warned us against them. You have said that we are fighting against principalities and powers... against satanic power. But You have also promised there is a greater power within us than the one who is in the world! We know Your Holy Spirit within us is more powerful than all the satanic forces in all the earth, in all the universe, in all the worlds that there may be. Help us to exert that power and authority today.