

“Looking for Help in All the Wrong Places” // 2 Corinthians 10:1–6 // *God’s Power in Broken Vessels* #9¹ // Su

VIDEO Announcement: Men’s Conference.

Summit MEN! One of the best things we do here is our Summit’s Men’s Conference, we got one coming up on March 6–7... It’s in two locations this year--our Capital Hills and our Alamance County Campus. It’s all live speakers everywhere--each speaker will be giving his talk twice--and the speakers we have coming this year are amazing--Joby Martin, Jon Tyson, Daniel Ritchie. (We only get to do this every couple of years because we have to share with the ladies.) I’m telling you, the power of being in the room with a bunch of other men praising Jesus and being challenged to live out God’s purposes for you--there’s nothing that compares to it. Ladies, force your men to go. You have my blessing to nag them until they do. You’ll thank me later for it. Dads, bring your sons, bring your friends, your friends’ sons. Single guys: come and a friend to come with you. Spots are going FAST...text REGISTER this weekend to 33933. Men: I challenged you to give me one year and here’s a chance to start it strong.

OK...2 Cor 10 if you have your Bibles, and would you stand with me for the reading of God’s word?

10:1 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!... 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Leader: **This is the Word of God for the people of God.**

People: ***Thanks be to God.***

There are certain times in your life when you really need to know how to call for help. One... is when you’re stuck on an elevator. I’ve actually been stuck on an elevator twice in my life...the first time was several years ago in Washington D.C. An older pastor mentor had invited me and something like a dozen other younger pastor friends to meet with some religious ambassadors from around the world. One of them was the Ambassador for Muslim Relations in the United States--he was from Turkey, if I recall. He had an office in one of the U.S. Capitol buildings and we had an appointment to meet with him but on our way to the Capitol we’d gotten stuck in DC traffic and were running a few minutes behind. So, when we got there, to save time, all 14 of us mashed ourselves onto this one elevator car. No problem, right? We were only going to the 4th floor and surely if there’s one place in the world you can count on things working properly, it’s the U.S. Capitol. Our elevator came to a screeching halt between the

¹ Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024); Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians*. Gary Millar, *2 Corinthians for You* (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020); Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (London, UK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Dr. Tony Evans, “[Reversing Addiction Curses](#)”, July 12, 2022, The Urban Alternative; John Mark Comer, “[A Community of Orthodoxy in a Culture of Ideological Idolatry](#)”, February 21, 2021, Bridgetown Church; Tim Keller, “[Jesus as King: The King of Hearts](#)”, January 23, 1994, Redeemer Presbyterian. And others as noted throughout.

3rd and 4th floors like a Republican Congress with a Democratic president. So imagine this: 14 grown men, in full suits, packed onto an elevator that probably would have reasonably fit around 6 middle school girls, in the dead of July.

Your impulse in that moment is to yell “HELP!” and start banging on the walls--establish a pee corner and bang on the walls. We did that (started yelling and banging), and we got some people’s attention--but, honestly, what could THEY do? Somebody even ran and got the Muslim ambassador we were supposed to meet with—he had a great sense of humor, btw—he came to the door and started saying, “Oh, I know. You pray to Jesus! He resurrect elevator!”

Well, after several hot, panicky minutes, this calm, little voice spoke out of the little call box that none of us had noticed yet. The voice said, “We heard you’re stuck and we’re sending out the fire department.” One of the pastors said, “We almost got the door open, we’re probably just gonna crawl out.” And she said, “Please don’t try to do that; if the elevator drops it could cut you in half.” And then the little voice went one of the pastors was like, “Why didn’t we just press that little call button to start with?” We’d all been so jammed in that none of us had thought to look for it.

The point is this: When you’re trapped in a stronghold like an elevator box, it helps to know where to turn for help--because some types of help are futile.

In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul discusses spiritual traps, spiritual struggles--specifically what works and what doesn’t. In **vs 3–4** he says there is a way of fighting spiritual battles that is frustrating, ineffective, and utterly exhausting.

The context of this passage is that Paul is once again defending himself--or, rather, explaining why in general he DOESN’T defend himself--at least not in the ways the Corinthians expect him to. Paul’s opponents asserted their authority by boasting in their credentials and their accomplishments. Paul says he refuses to do that because those things are utterly insignificant when it comes to true spiritual power.

He gives the heart of his reasoning in vs **4: For** (the reason I am not boasting in my credentials or asserting my will or my authority is that) **the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.**

The weapons I use, Paul says, are not weapons of the flesh; they are weapons of the Spirit, and as such have nothing to do with the strength of our flesh. Therefore, comparing my credentials against yours, or my talents against yours is useless.

This chapter is an incredible study in how to engage in spiritual battles of any type. It will relieve you of the strain and pressure and anxiety you feel when you think everything depends on you; it will also cure you of the insecurity that comes from comparing the abilities of your flesh to someone else’s and feeling like you don’t measure up or have what it takes.

For example, even though this passage is not specifically about parenting (Paul never mentions parenting in these verses), it’s been immensely helpful to me as a parent.

- If there's one thing parenting has taught me, it's that my flesh doesn't have what it takes to produce righteous affections in my kids. (I'm sorry, I don't. And neither do you. You parents of younger kids--it's easier for you to learn that now.)
- There's a limit to what I can do--and striving, or the stress that comes from feeling like I am the one who has to shape their hearts so that they love the right things; or those feelings of inadequacy that come from comparing yourself to others (and, you're like, "J.D., you feel inadequate as a parent?" Listen, every parent I know feels inadequate! I think it's why God gives us kids. I always tell people, "If you want to hear the most eloquent, most confident-sounding sermons on parenting, listen to the ones I preached at this church before I had kids. 24 years ago when you called me as pastor, I had no kids and 4 GREAT messages on parenting. Now I have 4 almost-grown kids and no great messages on parenting. As a parent you feel this worry that you don't have what it takes and so you're always comparing yourself to other parents--those emotions show you have fallen back into trying to wage this battle in your flesh.)

Look at **vs 1**: Paul says he carries himself with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Meekness, gentleness, patience (would be a word that goes along with these)--those stand in contrast with the pushiness or the boastiness or the anxiety that comes from assuming you're the one responsible to bring about change.

The principle taught in these verses is so foundational to the Christian life that I wanted to do a deeper dive on them. We've been taking mostly whole chapters in this series, but I wanted to zero on 3 or 4 verses today. In some ways today will be a little bit like Christianity 101, but this principle has enormous implications for any relationship you're in, any spiritual battle you're trying to fight--whether you're leading a church (like Paul was), or trying to parent kids or influence a friend, or even simply trying to grow yourself spiritually.

And--it's a perfect insight to meditate on during our 21 DOPF because it explains why we devote so much time to things like prayer and fasting.

Vs. 3: "We are not waging war according to the flesh." True spiritual victory can only be supernaturally supplied.

Why? Because our flesh doesn't possess what our spirit most needs. Throughout his letters, Paul diagnoses our spiritual condition as consisting of 2 primary problems: **(1) He says, We are spiritually dead and (2) We are satanically bound.** And against both these battlefronts, the power of the flesh is useless.

In this passage, Paul talks more explicitly about this second one, but implied here (underlying Paul's assumptions in this passage) is this first one, so let me take you to Ephesians where spells this one out.

((1) Spiritually dead)

Ephesians: 2:1, Paul says, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins... (not sick or weak or confused, but dead, now, watch this) **3 We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature** (that is, deep in our heart of hearts) **children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."**

By nature, that is, in the core of who we are, we are children of wrath. That means by nature we turn away from God: instead of trusting him, we doubt him. Instead of depending on him, we want to be independent from him. Instead of prioritizing him, we elevate idols in his place.

That manifests in different ways for different ones of us--for some of us this nature manifests itself through a lascivious lifestyle whereby we throw off all restraint and give ourselves to reckless living. For others of us, our desire for independence manifests itself in our pride for how well we've kept all the rules, because we think it shows we're morally superior and that we're not in desperate need of God's grace and power. It's interesting here in vs 3, Paul says, "**We all** once lived in the passions of our flesh." Paul had been a fastidious rule keeper all of his life. He'd never been a party boy or a prodigal son. And yet, he still says "we all" lived in the passions of our flesh.

You see, one kind of sinner shows their desire for independence from God through rule-breaking; the other shows it through rule-keeping--but the core desire is the same--a desire for self-sufficiency and independence from God.)

What God wants is not a mere reformation of our behavior, what he wants are people who "**by nature**" love and depend on him. People who don't need to be coerced to obey him through promises of blessing or threats of punishment but who, by nature, *want* to do his will.

Here's an illustration I haven't used in a long while, but it's one of my favorites. (BTW, you can track how long you've been at Summit by how many times you've heard this illustration, because I tell it about every 4.5 years. It's like the rings on a tree--you can tell how long you've been here by how many times you've heard this story. I went back and looked and the last time I told this, I believe, was 2019, so, we're overdue: **My senior year of high school**, I'd started dating a girl who was a cheerleader at our rival school. She lived about an hour from me and our relationship was... fine. But--I don't know--it was just missing the magic. We dated for most of my senior year and then after graduation, I went off to my first year of college in upper state NY. Now, this was in the days before Snapchat and Instagram so I was like, "I'm not sure what this means about our relationship. Do we... break up?" I wasn't sure what to do, so I did the cowardly thing and just left for school. I'm still embarrassed about that. But we talked a couple of times on the phone and never discussed the status of our relationship, and then I came home for Christmas break and arranged to go see her. And as I was driving out to her house, I can remember where it occurred to me, that it was the 22nd of December, and this was a girl I might be dating, and how embarrassing it would be if she had a Christmas present for me and I didn't have one for her. I thought, "If she has one for me and I don't have one for her, I'm going to look really bad." But, on the other hand, I'm a poor college student, and I can't afford to drop \$100 on some girl I have no future with... so what's a brother to do?" And so, on the way to her house I swung into a shopping center and ran into basically a Dick's Sporting Goods, and there, on the sale rack, I saw it. (I think it had a heavenly glow around it or something: It was an Adidas NECK WARMER, the kind you wore when you were skiing. It said "Adidas" in great big letters on it. It cost \$7. And I thought, "This is perfect. If she gives me something for Christmas, I'll have something to give to her; and if she doesn't have a gift for me; well, that puppy is mine." So I bought it, so I bought it and put it in a little bag and put it in the backseat of my car. I get to her house, and she flings the door open and gives me the biggest hug and says, "Oh, J.D., it's so good to see you! And she walks straight over to the Christmas tree and says, "I got you a present." And I was like, "Yeah... I got you a Christmas present TOO!" thinking about that little treasure in the back seat of my car. Thankfully, however, I didn't go get it. She gives me my gift...

To this day... If she had found out the circumstances of that gift, do you think she'd have been flattered to receive it? No, no girl wants to be pursued out of a sense of duty or obligation. I compare that story to just a few years later when I dropped more money than I'd ever spent in my life on a ring that sits on Veronica's finger. And I remember at the time wishing I'd had even more to spend, because I was so in love with her.

God doesn't want people in heaven who love him out of a sense of obligation, or because they are trying to prove they are good people. He wants people who by nature love and *want* to obey him. *It's why we say: **God is not just after obedience, he's after a whole new kind of obedience;*** an obedience that grows out of desire. An obedience where you seek God because you crave God; in which you pursue righteousness because you love righteousness.

And how does God produce that kind of change in us? Not through weapons of the flesh! Our flesh doesn't have the power of resurrection in it. It's a power that only flows from an empty tomb--from the tomb of a Savior who conquered death in the flesh and was raised to God by the Spirit. And you ***access it not by striving in the flesh***, but by trusting in faith.

One of the best OT pictures of this is Numbers 21. Israel had disobeyed God and God sent snakes in as a punishment, and when the snakes bit the people a bunch of them got really sick. So, God had Moses fashion a bronze image of the serpents and hoist it up on a pole and told the people that if they simply looked at that bronze serpent, in faith, they'd be healed.

What a picture! No human remedy could heal the disease--you couldn't work your way out of it or medicate your way out of it--you had to simply look with faith to God's provision and you'd be made whole. The Apostle John tells us, John 3, that this is the picture of how Jesus saves us--like the serpent, Jesus was lifted up on the cross, so that when we look to him, his healing life flows into us. The simple gospel message is **LOOK and LIVE.**

So, our first problem is we're **spiritually dead**. Our second problem is that we are **(2) Satanically bound.**

2 Cor 10:4, Paul says we are subdued by "**strongholds**." That's imagery from ancient warfare. In those days when an enemy took over a city, they would erect walls around the city and build a moat and set out booby traps and put soldiers in the battlements around the walls so no one could approach it. That's a stronghold.

Paul says we're not only spiritually dead, the enemy has set up **strongholds** around our hearts and minds.

- Earlier in this letter, **2 Cor 4:4** Paul says, "**The god of the world has blinded the minds of unbelievers.**" As unbelievers we are not just confused or under-instructed; we're enveloped by a supernatural, satanically-induced blindness until the Holy Spirit wakes us up.
- In **Ephesians 2**, Paul said that people in the world **...follow the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now *at work in* the sons of disobedience...** (Ephesians 2:2) "*At work in the sons of disobedience.*" When you're not living in submission to Christ, there is a literal spirit at work in you.

(And, I know this is starting to make some of you nervous. You're like, *"Satanically bound"*? Demons at work in us? I knew this church was too good to be true; this is where things get weird and they start bringing out the snakes and identifying various Hollywood personalities and political figures as the devil." And, let's be honest, church--a lot of Christians talk about demons in ways that are--to put it mildly--unhelpful. I know people who attribute every annoyance in their lives to the devil.

- Knee pain—the devil. Traffic on 540—the devil.
- Kids acting up—the devil.
- Lady at the DMV tells you that you are missing one form that you swear was not listed on the DMV website under 'documentation required to get your Real ID'? *The devil.*
- *(That last one might have some merit, but it's not what Paul is talking about here.)*

Furthermore, I know sometimes people use demon talk as a substitute for getting medical or psychological help. Or they've labeled people demonic in ways that were really hurtful.

So yes, I get it--there's a lot that can go wrong here. But **when Paul uses the word "stronghold" in vs 4** he is pointing to some reality he wants us to know about. Get this: demons or the demonic realm is mentioned 250 separate times in the New Testament, almost once per chapter, and if you don't understand the true nature of the opposition, you're going to be totally ill-equipped to do battle. You'll be like the person showing up with baseball bats and rocks to take on an army equipped with tanks and machine guns.

If you're skeptical, let me ask you to at least consider this, before you waive all this away as naive, archaic superstition... when you look at the history of the human race, or what's going on in our world, doesn't it at least suggest the presence of some darker evil at work?

I mean, honestly how plausible is it, that at the root of the Holocaust was just a man with an inflated sense of national pride and a wounded ego from flunking out of art school? Or, to look at the brutishness and savage cruelty of the slave trade in otherwise educated and enlightened countries and say it was merely greed?

In the face of enormous, heinous, senseless evil, most of us sense there are dark and powerful and evil forces at work. And that's probably why the vast majority of people throughout history—and the vast majority of people in the world today—recognize the reality of supernatural spiritual forces at work. If you think that all the evil in the world can be explained away by merely physical factors--market forces gone wrong, the survival of the fittest instinct misapplied--no offense, but maybe you're the naïve one?

Paul says that Satan is literally **at work** in disobedience. But here's the important caveat--when Paul says this, he's not talking about **demon possession, per se**--like we typically think about it, Exorcist style, where a demon takes you over and you go crazy and start scratching people and destroying stuff and floating six feet above your bed. I'm not saying that stuff doesn't happen, but **that's not primarily what Paul is talking about here.**

"Following the prince of the power of the air" is not possession language, it's influence and oppression language. It means you are "influenced" and "captivated" by the demonic.

It's what Paul is talking about in our passage, (2 Cor 10:4), when he talks about strongholds.

- Your disobedience to Christ allows Satan to set up a stronghold in your life. He takes you captive in that area and uses that stronghold to unleash spiritual destruction into your life.
- Think of a stronghold as any area of your life not brought under the dominion of Christ. Any area of your life not flying his flag. Paul defines "stronghold" for you in vs 5 of our passage, a **"stronghold"** consists of "arguments" and "every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God."

Think of your life like a large house with a lot of room. And because it's such a large house, there's a bunch of rooms you can sublet--so you rent out several rooms to other tenants, and some of them turn out to be bad tenants; they play music way too loud at night; there's these really awful smells coming from their rooms that make you wonder what is going on in there. That's what Paul is pointing to here. Any room in your life (the family room, the boyfriend room, the money room, the self-image room) not under submission to Christ is subject to demonic influence, manipulation or oppression.

In Ephesians, Paul uses a different metaphor to describe this same phenomenon, one I find extremely helpful. He calls Satan's lies or his temptations "flaming darts" aimed at our hearts. (Eph 6:16).

- A flaming dart was one of Rome's most feared weapons (PIC). It was basically this long, hollow javelin filled with flammable oil and then set on fire as they launched it. **The worst damage caused by the flaming dart** was that when it hit, the oil inside it would explode out onto everything around it and catch it on fire.
- That's a good picture of a Satanic attack: he gets you to believe a lie and then uses that stronghold to spray out a bunch of destruction.

A flaming dart is a lie or a temptation that just forces its way into your consciousness and brings destruction with it. The ancient Christian mystic Evagrius (PIC), who lived around 370 A.D. said "A flaming dart = A thought with a will behind it." An idea that is trying to take you over. Thoughts you can't shake.

I pick up on these when somebody believes something that just seems so absurd and is really wrecking their lives. There's a voice they just can't shake that says:

- "You are ugly. Unattractive."
- Or, "You'll never have any friends." Or "You're a failure."
- Or this sense of utter insignificance. "Nobody sees you. Everybody has forgotten you. Nobody is concerned whether you live or die."
- **I was listening to an interview** with the Christian comedian **Jon Crist**; he's one of the funniest people out there, but some of you know this--4-5 years ago he had this big crash where it came out he was living this double life involving substance abuse and engaging in a lot of destructive and hurtful behaviors, and that led him to depression and suicidal thoughts. In this interview he was explaining what led him to this dark

place--not excusing, just explaining--and he talked about how at the **Christian rehab facility they helped him identify all these lies he'd started to believe about himself in childhood**. Things that just didn't make sense. It wasn't things his parents were teaching him. "People only like you when they're laughing. And if they're not laughing, nobody even wants you around."

What I found most fascinating in the interview was when he said, "I don't know why these lies became so convincing to me. I can see now that they weren't accurate. I was taking random events and comments to weave a narrative that said 'I was forgotten' and 'I had no value unless I could make people like me through humor.' That fear drove me to despair that led me to alcoholism and abuse and serious depression." Friend, that's a flaming dart from our enemy. He drives destructive lies into our consciousness and uses them to set our lives on fire.

Have you experienced this? A thought that just kind of presses its way into your consciousness?

- It doesn't USUALLY take the form of audible voices. Usually, it's just a driving thought that seems to pursue you. "You are a terrible father. Your family would probably be better off without you." "Everything you do, you fail at." Or "Nobody could love you." You don't have any friends. "You're ugly, people don't like you." Or even right now it's saying to you: You don't belong in here. God's not interested in you. You're not savable. Everyone here is looking at you. You should get out of here now. All Christians are hypocrites. God's not real. Jesus is a hoax."
- Those are fiery darts; Satan is trying to set up strongholds so he can use them to consume you.

Others of you experience these lies in a more subtle way. He's just convinced you not to believe Jesus' word in some area--

- **For example, you've not believed Jesus's words about forgiveness**, or the importance of letting vengeance belong to him. Instead, you've nursed that grudge and grown resentful and demonic powers are using that stronghold to darken your soul.
- Or **you've not believed what God has said about money**--about trusting him with it and putting him first with it being generous with it and that stronghold is corrupting you. It's turning you into a different person.
- **Or you don't believe what he says about sex**: you want to do things your way. This is one of Satan's most effective weapons. He uses that stronghold to bring all kinds of sorrow into your life.
- **For yours it was a tendency to focus on what others thought about me** instead of what Jesus thinks about me has been a gateway through which Satan has been able to bring all kinds of problems into my life
- **Maybe for you it's that you can't be satisfied with how you look or how Jesus has made you** and so now you're obsessed about your weight and how you compare to others, and that's causing deep insecurity and even bringing into your life things like eating disorders.
- **You don't believe what the Bible says about God's wrath** or the way of salvation because those things seem distasteful, and you think you're just formulating your own belief system, but the enemy has established a stronghold in your life from which he is sowing confusion and disorder and eventually resentment of God into you.
- **I could go on and on.**

(vs 5) Any "arguments and lofty opinions" you have not brought under submission to Christ have become strongholds for the enemy.

How does Paul say we battle strongholds? Vs 5: We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ. IOW, we infuse every part of our lives with God's truth and bring every part of our life under submission to Christ.

The good news is, if you're a Christian, Jesus owns your house now, and at any time you can go to any of those unsavory tenants and declare, with Jesus's authority, "This is Jesus's room, and you have to get out." And the demon says, "Who are you? You're not strong enough to throw me out," and you're like, "Well, maybe I can't, but he can, and this room is now under his authority." By bringing every thought captive to Christ, you are establishing his rule in that part of your life.

When I was a kid several of the boys in my neighborhood were older than me, and we used to all meet up to hang out together, but a couple of them were real bullies. One of them was like 16 when I was about 10. And one day we had our BB guns and he told me that you could shoot your foot with your BB gun and you couldn't feel it through your shoe. And he said, "Watch" and shot his shoes right where his toes and it didn't seem to hurt--what I didn't know is that he had curled his toes back. So I did it and it sent me into these convulsions of pain. Which is kind of funny now, and maybe you could draw some conclusions about my general lack of discernment back then, but that's just kind of how they were. Well, one day we were out playing football in my yard and a few of the older boys were getting all pushy and mouthy and really taking advantage of us younger kids, and I remember my dad just walked out on the porch. He didn't have to say a word, but at that moment their terrorizing of me was done. His presence there said, "This is MY house and MY yard and that's MY son and you will not terrorize him." That's what Jesus does when you surrender to him. He just shows up, and his presence says, "That's my son. That's my daughter, and this is my property. Hands off." And the battle is won.

The way we establish his reign in an area of our lives is, **vs 5**, by taking every thought captive to Christ. That puts him in charge of a room and that--**his power--and that ALONE**--destroys that stronghold.

This is one of the reasons you have to be active in a church--because only by knowing the Scripture can you do this. You can't "destroy false arguments" or "take every thought captive to Christ" if you don't know his word in various areas.

- **That's what Jesus demonstrated for us in his battle with Satan**--he quoted Scripture. He brought every thought under submission to God's word.
- **If your view of relationships is shaped more by Taylor Swift** and the Hallmark Channel than Titus and Song of Solomon, you're in trouble. And I don't mean any disrespect toward T on that one--just saying that her words and her music, no matter how uplifting you find them, are unable to deliver you from Satan's oppression and bring Jesus's spiritual life to that area.

Tony Evans talks about a rehab clinic he'd recommended to a lot of people who struggled with addiction. At this clinic, if the person is a Christian, the clinic tells them, "You are not a drug addict. You are a blood-bought child of the living God who already has been given victory over drugs. That's who you are." And every time they run into someone at the clinic, they have to introduce themselves as 'a blood-bought child of God who already

has victory over drugs.’ After a week or two, they begin to believe it. This particular clinic boasts a 72% success rate after six months, which is really high.

I’m not trying to be simplistic and say that overcoming addiction is easy--just change your view of yourself and all your problems will go away. No, I understand sometimes there are all kinds of things tied up in addiction and you might need professional or medical help. All I’m saying is that you’ll never find true victory if you skip the foundational element. Satan begins his stronghold in your mind--making you believe wrong things about God and yourself. You have to destroy the stronghold by bringing those thoughts captive to Christ..

- **Maybe** you’re sitting here and **you’re overwhelmed by guilt. Guilt whispers to you, “You can never be good enough; you’re disqualified…”** Hear Jesus’s words to you right now--he says: **“Though your sins were as scarlet, I have made them white as snow. I have put them away, as far as the East is from the West. Believe him and let him DESTROY that stronghold.**
- **Insignificance says to you** “You’re not important. You’ll never amount to anything.” Jesus says with a louder voice, “I have **seated you with me in the heavenly places.** Every promise of God for you is yes in Christ Jesus. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.” As you believe this, you can feel those strongholds coming down.
- **Anxiety says:** “It’s all going to go bad. Everything is going to fall apart. And then what will happen to your kids and family when they do?” Jesus says, in a calm but commanding voice: **“Yet my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in Christ Jesus, not a hair falls from your head without your Father’s knowledge, so you can be anxious for nothing but in everything with prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace that passes all understanding will guard my hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” I’m telling you--believe this, and you’ll feel that stronghold crumbling.**
- **Despair says:** **“This is the end. There’s no way out. Life is over.”** Jesus says: **“Nothing can ever separate you from my love. Neither height nor depth nor principalities nor powers nor anything in all creation can separate you from my love of God in Christ Jesus. And I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to give you a future and a hope, to use you for blessing and for good.”**

Joshua 6: Israel has just crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, and the first thing they come to is the fortress (the stronghold) of Jericho. You’re supposed to read these Old Testament stories through the lens of the New, and when you do you recognize that the Promised Land in the Old Testament was a picture of the Christian life. Crossing the Jordan River represents our conversion and baptism. So, these people already belonged to God, and now, after becoming Christians, they have this huge, satanic fortress in front of them. They can’t use the weapons of the flesh: they had no experience in tearing down fortresses and they didn’t have any equipment. These walls were insurmountable. So, they asked God what to do and God’s instructions sounded crazy. Put the Ark of the Covenant in front of you and walk around the city once a day for six days. Then on the seventh day, do that seven times, and on the 7th time lift up a shout of victory. ***What kind of military strategy is that? It doesn’t make any sense.*** But they did it, and on that 7th time when they shouted God brought the walls down. Basically, he made them walk several miles just declaring to everybody, “We can’t overcome this stronghold, but God can,” and when they shouted that truth to the world, God unleashed the power of the Spirit.

(VAMP)

Friend, hear this: The greatest needs of your life--whether we're talking about your own spiritual growth or the spiritual development in your kids--in all those things the weapons of the flesh are all but useless in producing change. To go back to our original story, you can bang on the walls and yell at the top of your lungs for help and it won't bring any. JUST PRESS THE CALL BUTTON of simple faith in Christ. It's the power of the Spirit you need, and that's released through simple faith and submission.

That's what makes these 21 DOPF so important... You think, "What kind of strategy is that for starting the year? I mean, we got a lot to do: shouldn't we be planning and fundraising and recruiting volunteers?"

We'll get to that. But starting with 21 DOPF is a GREAT strategy if you understand what kinds of weapons these battles call for. Friend, listen, I've been meditating on this promise all week: *Jesus said he would NEVER deny the Spirit to any of his children who asked him for him* in faith. He'll give him to you this morning.

Bow heads:

I want to leave you some time to deal with these things as the Holy Spirit wants you to. In a moment our worship teams will come.

And I want to invite you: some of you need to come up here and pray for God's power to break a stronghold. To ask for the Holy Spirit in simple faith. You may not know all you're up against, but the best word to describe it is stronghold. You know it's more than flesh and blood. It could be in your own life; the life of your kids; your marriage. Your friends. You know that what you're wrestling with this weekend isn't human, and it's time to recognize this battle for what it is and engage the right weapons. That's what this altar is for... Bring someone with you. If you want to pray with an elder or pastor or one of our church leaders, they will be on the side. They can help you pray and break this stronghold.

- I want to invite you to come up here, get on your knees, and formally renounce striving in the flesh and declare your rest in simple trust and obedience....