



breakthroughs

**finding freedom and true
fulfillment in jesus**

Lesson 8: Strongholds, Part 2

Let's begin this week's lesson with a review of some things that we are learning in Breakthroughs. Reviewing what we are learning will help us remember the material so that we can apply it to our lives. If you are having a tough time absorbing the material then look back at previous lessons.

For review:

What does it take for us to begin to take steps out of darkness?

What are markers and how are they formed?

What is the purpose of arrows formed by the enemy?

What are 'little gods'?

What is the basic definition of a stronghold?

You are starting the 8th week in Breakthroughs. It is a huge accomplishment to stick to a process that digs into our hearts and life. It is not easy to look at the pain in our lives and to commit to make changes. Be encouraged that you are taking huge steps and have not given up. **That is what we call walking in faith!**

Last week we were introduced to the topic of Strongholds. Strongholds are very difficult to destroy in our lives, but God teaches us how to destroy them in His Word. We will learn in Lesson 11 how to destroy strongholds in our lives but this week we will focus on a very common but dangerous type of stronghold which is our emotions. Again, this lesson calls for us to think deeply.

Emotions as a stronghold can grip us in such a way that they lead us to other strongholds. For example, if fear is an emotional stronghold then we may run to food or a drug to help us with the fear. As we seek relief from fear with food or a drug we end up making the food or drug another stronghold in our lives. So, we can actually have multiple strongholds at the same time. Before you begin to feel overwhelmed, please remember that we are asking God to direct our steps and help us on this road to healing and freedom in our lives. God usually frees us from one stronghold at a time. *As we understand and trust God's path towards healing and freedom, we will walk it with more ease.* It will be easier to trust God. It will also be easier to identify the arrows and markers that led us to follow the little gods until they become strongholds.

Those of us who struggle with addictions often have a tough time identifying our feelings. We may have had to ignore our feelings as a child because they were too painful to face, or we did not have anyone to help us deal with them. Disconnecting from our emotions/feelings is often a way we survive painful things in our life.

How difficult is it for you to identify your feelings/emotions?

Perhaps you can identify one emotion but not other emotions. For example, some people have a lot of anger and they struggle with losing their temper. They can't identify the pain behind anger and they rarely cry, but anger comes natural to them.

Do you have one emotion that seems to dominate all other emotions? If so, what is that emotion?

It is very important for us to learn to identify our emotions and then learn to manage them in a healthy way. Our emotions can tell us something about what we are thinking and feeling about ourselves, our lives and others, but our emotions are not always reliable. When we don't eat properly, get enough sleep and don't exercise, it will affect us emotionally. Our emotions are influenced by the music we listen to and the shows that we watch. There are a variety of things that influence our emotions on any given day.

Consider your emotions and how they may impact your choice to follow 'little gods.' Do you think that your emotions have ever pulled you in a direction that you did not want to go? Describe what that felt like for you.

For us to identify emotional strongholds in our lives, we need to first learn to identify our emotions. This may seem basic but when we turn to little gods for comfort, it is also to escape painful emotions. Our little gods help us gain temporary relief from painful emotions so we learn to disconnect from our emotions. As we seek healing and freedom from Christ, we will begin to connect with those emotions that we tried

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to push down hoping they would disappear. Remember that God calls us out of darkness (hiding our emotions) and into His light (1 Peter 2:9) so that He can heal and free us of our pain.

Please circle any of the following emotions that you have recently experienced:

Anger	Fear	Guilt	Helplessness
Hopelessness	Jealousy	Self-Pity	Resentment
Shame	Anxiety	Depression	Pride
Loneliness	Desperation	Apathy	Defeated

If you have experienced other painful emotions recently, then please list them.

Do you feel that any of the emotions that you circled seem to control you at times? If so, what emotions would you like help in overcoming?

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Strongholds such as drugs, alcohol, food, shopping and pornography are tangible things. Emotions are not tangible (we can't touch, taste or see them), but they are just as real as a tangible stronghold. There is another difference between a tangible stronghold and an emotional stronghold. A tangible stronghold usually produces an immediate pleasurable response, but an emotional stronghold does not usually produce an immediate pleasure response. An emotional stronghold, such as fear, produces an immediate and unpleasant response. You may be wondering how something unpleasant can become a place of refuge (stronghold). Why would we find refuge in an unpleasant emotion? Wouldn't we want to run from unpleasant emotions and not run to them?

This brings us to a place where we must look at how twisted the enemy can work in hearts that have been wounded. When we experience pain in life, either because someone hurt us, we made a poor choice, or we experienced a loss of some sort, our hearts will feel pain. This is normal and a natural part of life. When we are hurt, we feel pain. God's plan is to heal our pain through our relationship with Him and the people He places in our life to help us, such as our parents. However, because we don't go to God for healing and we don't always have people in our life to help us heal, we try to heal our own hearts. We do this by ignoring pain, turning to 'little gods' to help numb the pain, or by allowing an emotion to become greater than the pain. This is how an emotional stronghold is formed. For example, if we are abandoned, we may allow our anger to become a hiding place to keep us from connecting with others as a way of protecting ourselves from getting hurt again. Another example would be if we had critical parents, then we may try to avoid the pain of facing our own weaknesses, so we hide behind pride.

Emotional strongholds can also be formed as a result of traumatic experiences in our lives. For example, if a child grows up in an unstable home where they do not feel secure, then fear will be a natural by-product of that environment. Children who grow up in these unstable homes or children who experience abuse will have deep feelings of insecurity. *Feeling insecure is a breeding ground for fear and fear is an emotion that can grip the soul. When fear grips a soul, it feels exactly like a stronghold. The fear has such a strong hold on the individual that they can't free themselves from the emotion.* The fear may be less intense at times but it is always near and does not stay away for very long.

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So, if our definition of a stronghold is a place of refuge, then how can an emotion like fear possibly be a place of refuge? This is where things get twisted for us and we need to think deeply. Abandonment, abuse, and rejection will cause a person to become fearful. These types of wounds swing the door wide open for fear to walk in and make itself at home. *Fear will not be pleasant, like a tangible stronghold, but we will become comfortable with having this unpleasant emotion in our life because we have wounds that welcome the fear. In other words, **our unhealed wounds find refuge in painful emotions.** Unhealed wounds can't feel comfortable and safe with anything other than painful emotions such as fear and shame.* The unhealed wounds and painful emotions can't separate from one another. They are tied to one another until we take our unhealed wounds to God. As God begins to heal our wounds, then emotions such as fear and shame aren't so comfortable for our hearts.

Understanding how emotional strongholds are built in our lives is difficult. We won't get a clear understanding of this overnight and this is not even our goal for this week's lesson. We need to be able to identify the emotional strongholds in our lives so that we can ask God to free us from them. Often we know what emotional stronghold we have because we desperately want to stop feeling a certain emotion. We know exactly how the bondage of an emotional stronghold feels.

It may be a great time to take a break from this week's lesson. You may want to take a break and come back to the lesson tomorrow. If so, may I suggest that when you come back to the lesson, begin by reading it from the start. The remainder of our workbook is not as complex as this week's lesson. Thankfully we have the hardest part of this week's lesson behind us.

If it helps for you to review what we've learned so far in this week's lesson, then summarize by listing the main points in the space provided.

FEAR OF MAN

We have looked at physical strongholds and emotional strongholds. Both types of strongholds build a fortress around our hearts and separate us from God. We will never experience significant change in our lives while being bound by the chains of a stronghold. If you have identified several strongholds in your life, you will experience significant change every time a stronghold is broken off from your life. However, *God's plan is for us to be free from ALL strongholds.*

The last type of stronghold we need to identify in our lives is “*fear of man.*”

We are told in Proverbs 29:25 (NIV) that “***Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.***”

What do you think it means to ‘fear man’ or to fear a person?

The type of fear that God is describing in Proverbs 29:25 is a fear that involves panic and trembling. To fear man means that we are so afraid of another person’s opinion of us, or view of us, that it produces a strong fear of rejection. When we fear that a person may reject us, we will try to please them, hoping to gain their approval. We may say things or do things to try to gain their approval. We learn to hide our true selves to avoid being rejected by those we seek to please. ***Fear of man is what is more commonly referred to as people pleasing.***

There are a few reasons why fear of man seems to affect one person more than another. First of all, God gives us personalities which affect how we respond to situations in life. Secondly, our family of origin deeply affects the degree in which we struggle with fear of man. A child that is raised in a healthy home with a mom and dad who love them and one another, and who is taught God’s Word in a loving manner will naturally be more secure than a child who is raised in a broken home or who has experienced abuse or has moved around a lot, etc.

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This is not to say that if you struggle with fear of man that you were raised in an unhealthy home. There are plenty of people from healthy homes who struggle with fear of man. The third influence, our culture, feeds us messages that cause us to fear man. We are fed images of perfect looking people who have fancy cars, houses, jobs and relationships, and this can cause the most secure person to doubt themselves. These messages indirectly tell us that we are not good enough so we better change or risk rejection.

It is time to do a little more digging into our heart's soil as it pertains to fear of man. Please take a moment and ask God to help you answer the following questions. These are not easy questions to answer. Again, most of us have learned to hide our hearts, even from ourselves. Take as much time as you need to really think about the questions and your answers.

Do you care about what others think about you?

How much do you care about what other people think about your appearance?

How much do you care about what other people think about your car, home, clothes?

How much do you care about what other people think about your education and occupation?

How much do you care about what other people think about your spouse, parents, and friends?

How does it make you feel when someone says something negative about you?

Do you ever try to impress people? If so, how?

Do you ever lie to keep others from knowing the truth about you?

Do you ever say things about yourself to try to make others think you are special or better than others?

Do you ever talk about your walk with God to impress others?

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How much time do you spend wondering what another person thinks about you?

How much time do you spend critiquing something you said or did around another person?

Do you ever say or do things to get other people's approval or acceptance? If so, give examples.

Who are some people you try to impress?

Who are some people whose approval is very important to you? Why do you think their approval is important?

How has your family of origin and your experiences in life affected your level of fear of man?

How does your personality affect your level of fear of man?

How does the culture and media affect your fear of man?

In summary, what have you learned about yourself regarding fear of man?

If a stronghold is a place of refuge, then how do you think fear of man can become a stronghold?

You just answered a lot of questions. You are doing a great job as looking within our hearts and lives is hard work. I hope you are encouraged because God loves you and is helping you!

Pain, as well as insecurity, can cause a person to become vulnerable to the opinions of other people. When we are hurting or we are feeling insecure, a kind word or an unkind word has greater impact on us than when we are having a good day and feeling secure about ourselves. If we get in a habit of looking for a kind word or approval from people when we are hurting, we can slowly begin to build a stronghold. We do this by seeking man's approval when we are hurting or feeling insecure and at the same time, try to avoid man's rejection. The cycle of seeking

approval and avoiding rejection is exactly what God's Word warns us about in Proverbs 29:25. God tells us that this cycle will get us in trouble, prove to be a snare or trap and disable us.

Think about how much energy it takes to try to gain approval from others and avoid their rejection. Think about what you have to do in order to get their approval and avoid their rejection. It may have a temporary level of comfort, but God tells us that in the end, we will be in trouble.

However, God has a plan for our hearts. He does not leave the hurting heart or the insecure heart alone, but provides the approval that our hearts long to receive. We are told in Proverbs 29:25 that "whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe." To trust God means to rely on Him, and to put our confidence in Him. This sounds very much like what we do when we run to a stronghold. Do you see the difference in the two strongholds? One is running to man and relying on his/her opinions, and one is running to God and putting confidence in Him. This does not mean that hearing a kind word from another person is wrong. God created us with a need to be encouraged. God also uses people to encourage us. However, we can begin to build a stronghold when we become dependent on man's approval of us instead of looking to God for His approval. It goes back to the messages that we read along the path. Our hearts desperately need to read God's messages – not man's opinions.

We've spent the last two weeks looking intently at the strongholds in our lives. It takes courage to face the physical and emotional strongholds that exist in our lives. It takes honesty to face our fear of man. Our strongholds have been a place of refuge for us but have caused us pain and bondage. For us to experience change, we need to admit to ourselves and to God that our strongholds are more powerful than we are and that we do not have the power to overcome them. When we admit this to ourselves and to God, we are positioning ourselves where we can begin to experience change in our lives.

The change that we need to make in our lives will be to make God our one and only stronghold. This means that we will let go of what is familiar and comfortable, and even pleasant at times, in order to embrace God. This change in direction is not easy and can be scary. **Making God our refuge is the single most important change that we can make in our lives.** When we make God our refuge, we will experience His presence in our lives. We will experience His peace, His love, His joy and our hearts will be healed and set free.

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God knows you and He knows any fears you have about making Him your stronghold. He knows that change is scary and knows you need His help to trust Him. Please close this week's lesson by writing a prayer to God. Tell God any fears you have about making Him your stronghold and making changes in your life. Ask God to help you trust Him and to give you courage to change.

My Prayer
