

NOTES ON STRONGHOLDS

Strongholds might be a very emotional time in your Rooted group. As we feel safer in our groups and some begin to hear God's voice, old scars, wounds, fears and secrets may surface.

- Make sure you have tissue boxes where everyone can reach them. Allow group members to be responsible for getting their own tissues so that no one goes running for the box. This can stop the flow or give the person a reason to stop talking. It can be very difficult for people to share and any distraction might stop them from moving forward and telling their story.
- Discourage anyone from jumping in or giving advice. Let the person completely finish. Others in the group may feel compelled to piggyback on his or her story with comments like, "I know how you feel," "That happened to me," etc. Be a strong leader and gently ask the group to let the person finish. In some cases, these stories are of graphic nature and this may cause certain group members to be uncomfortable. They may try to curtail the conversation by saying something like "It's not so bad," or "Just give it to the Lord," or "You'll be okay." This will stop the person from telling his or her story.

In past Rooted groups, brave people have shared about abuse they experienced growing up. Here are some of the things to watch out for when people share about strongholds and abuse:

- As people share their stories, be aware of the audible cues or noises coming from other group members. People are very sensitive to rejection and have antennas up for any sort of disgust or negativity. One leader shared that in her group, a woman was so saddened by what a victim dealt with, she was saying "Oh no," and "Oh my." The victim interpreted that to mean she was bad or disgusting, continuing the lies she already believed about herself.
- Make sure the victim knows none of this was his or her fault. He/she is not disgusting, but brave, courageous, and beautiful!
- As much as possible, ask before reaching out to touch a group member, whether it be holding their hand during prayer, hugging them, or putting your hand on their shoulder. Be sensitive to their reactions. In certain cases, touching may be confusing to them.

Remember that the reason that victims don't want to talk about this is that they may feel (incorrectly):

- It was their fault
- No one will believe them
- The abuser still has power over them and they will get into trouble if they talk about it (no matter how much time has passed)
- Men especially may feel they should not be victims and this abuse shows they are weak
- This is private, and such a personal secret has to be kept inside and stuffed down deep

When the secret or wound is brought to the light, God can begin to heal.

Hindrances to Spiritual Leadership

Warnings given to followers of Jesus because we are susceptible to demonic attack:

- *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* Ephesians 6:11
- *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.* Ephesians 6:12
- *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* 1 Peter 5:8
- *He (Satan) was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.* Revelation 13:7
- *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.* 1 Timothy 4:1
- *Those who oppose him (the Lord's servant) he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.* 2 Timothy 2:25-26
- *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* 2 Corinthians 11:3

We can clearly see by these verses that Christians today are indeed engaged in the same manner of spiritual warfare that Jesus and His disciples confronted. Both the Old and New Testaments are full of references to evil and unclean spirits.

The overwhelming evidence in the Bible shows that our Father desires all his children to grow in character and power to conform to the image of Jesus Christ. Because of their potential to grow more like Jesus and to extend the Kingdom of God, those who follow Jesus are under greater demonic scrutiny than unbelievers.

What can you know about Satan from the following verses:

- He is the ruler of the kingdom of the air, now at work in those who disobey God

As for you, you were dead in your transgression and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Ephesians 2:1,2

- He masquerades as an angel of light

And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. 2 Corinthians 11:14, 15

- He takes people captive to do his will

That they will come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:26

What can you know from the following verses about the battle going on over your mind, will, and emotions?

- We are not fighting a habit, a character weakness, or even other people

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12

- Satan is committed to our destruction

Then the dragon (earlier described as Satan in Rev 12:9) was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Revelation 12:17

- Jesus came to destroy the work of Satan in every believer's life

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 1 John 3:8

- Satan is always at work sowing destruction

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

Satan's influence in your life is often hidden, controlled through strongholds in your mind, will and emotions. The spirits of darkness have been given permission by your sinful decisions and those of your forefathers to take up residence within those areas of your mind, will and emotions that are not yielded fully to Christ. The freedom available to you in Christ is thwarted, and you are kept imprisoned by the influence of those demonic strongholds.

Key to the operation and destruction of strongholds is 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight 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. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

The Definition of Strongholds

A stronghold is a demonic fortress of thoughts housing evil spirits that

- control, dictate, and influence your attitudes and behavior
- oppress and discourage you
- filter and color how you view or react to situations, circumstances or people

As you entertain thoughts and participate in activities that are contrary to the will of God, you open yourself up to demonic inhabitation in those areas. When these thoughts and activities become habitual, you allow a spiritual fortification to be built around that demonic spirit and its influence. You become so accustomed to responding to the influence and control of the “voice” of that spirit that you believe it’s the voice of your own mind.

A demonic stronghold is anything compelling enough to hold you in its power to keep you from receiving God’s love and truth. Within a stronghold that’s been erected in your mind, will and emotions, that spirit arouses a defensive posture that causes you to “rationalize” your current situation. The existence of a stronghold can be recognized because it will be that area of your life in which you consistently have problems and cannot live in victory. You can tell a spiritual stronghold is established because a habitual pattern of failure or hopelessness exists. This isn’t a one-time event or response, but a consistent ungodly thought pattern or action that is your first inclination. And those areas of your mind, will and emotions that you have willingly yielded to sin are fair game to become footholds for satanic involvement. Heed the warning in Luke 11:35, 36 *“See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely light, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”*

A chief demonic goal is to destroy your intimate relationships: your relationship with your Father and His Son, Jesus, with those in your household, and with those with whom you share close fellowship are targets the demonic forces seek to destroy. Why? Because emotionally isolated people are easier for them to influence, control, and oppress than people who have loving, supportive relationships.

Yes, Christians Can Be Demonized

“Therefore, do not let sin rule in your mortal bodies, so that it makes you obey its desires; and do not offer any part of yourselves to sin as an instrument for wickedness. On the contrary, offer yourselves to God as people alive from the dead, and your various parts to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under legalism but under grace. Therefore, what conclusion should we reach? ‘Let’s go on sinning, because we’re not under legalism but under grace’? Heaven forbid! Don’t you know that if you present yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, then, of the one whom you are obeying, you are slaves – whether of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to being made righteous?” Romans 6:12-16

When fortresses of demonic influence – strongholds – have been built in your mind, will, and emotions, your

- hearing from God is altered
- belief in God is shaken
- desires are distorted
- actions are disobedient
- relationships are debased

Identify And Demolish Strongholds

Spiritual strongholds are:

1. inherited from past generations;
2. established when you try to meet any of the seven basic needs (Dignity, Authority, Blessing & Provision, Security, Purpose & Meaning, Freedom & Boundary, Intimate Love & Companionship) that God created in you through ways that are contrary to His will;
3. maintained when you live in a state of unrepentance. The end result is demonic influence in areas of your mind, will and emotions.

Remember, Once a stronghold is established, you provide a “foothold” for the devil (see Ephesians 4:27), a base of operations for the “strongman” (see Matt 12:29). You then become vulnerable to demonic control, direction, influence and/or oppression in that area of your life. Not dealing with this stronghold can engender further demonic activity and lead to the establishment of other strongholds with additional demonic harassment in other areas of your mind, will and emotions.

Demolishing the Strongholds in Jesus’ Name

Freedom is available to you. All demonic forces submit to the authority of the name of Jesus. Your eviction of their control, influences, arguments and pretensions is totally dependent on their submission to our Lord Jesus. The name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ delivers you, not your own strength or some prayer technique.

Remember:

- You are dealing with demonic spirits and fortresses that occupy your mind, will and emotions.
- Don’t delay in praying for your own deliverance – keep going!
- Demonic forces will do all they can to delay or stop their eviction. Your earnest follow-through is critical at this time!

Your Repentance Is Essential In Renouncing Spiritual Strongholds

You may have identified several demonic strongholds in your mind, will and emotions. No matter how many you're about to demolish, remember this: You are Responsible for the sins you committed while being influenced by the strongholds. Take ownership of your responsibility.

Repentance is a critical part of our pilgrimage to salvation. Biblical repentance is far more than acknowledging that you've sinned by violating God's commands. True Repentance flows from you taking full responsibility for the hurt and harm you have brought about in your fellowship with God. True Repentance always demands a heart conviction that you both turn away from that sin (your violation of God's Word), and that you turn to God and discover that which His Word requires of you. You need to purpose in your heart to leave those sins behind! (Acts 20:21; 2 Corinthians 7:10) Repentance calls for action.

If you don't recognize the hurt you've caused, you won't take heart-felt responsibility for it. And, if you don't seek God's way to fill in the ruts of your sinful actions, you'll return to the same sins "like a dog to its vomit." You'll fall prey to the same pattern of ungodly thoughts, ungodly emotions, ungodly actions, habitual action, which becomes a controlling stronghold in your mind, will and emotions. Jesus warns what will happen if you are delivered from an evil spirit but don't fill in that sin area God's way:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean, and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation. (Matthew 12:43-45)

Continue to stay immediately repentant throughout your life. A heart that is ready to repent is harder for demons to seduce. Be quick to confess your sin when you fail, and turn away from further tempting situations. Unrepentance will lead you back to stronghold development. How life-giving to hold onto this rich truth because of the shed blood of Jesus: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9) So do as Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, *"Now go, and don't sin any more."* (John 8:11b)

You Have Divine Power In The Name of Jesus

Each follower of Jesus has the power of the Holy Spirit to renounce spiritual strongholds with the authority of the Name of Jesus our Lord. We *"have divine power to demolish strongholds"* (2 Corinthians 10:4). After you've examined the symptoms that identify the strongholds, renounce each stronghold by name. Confess any sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts you that you committed under that spirit's influence. Pray, relying on the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus and the power of His shed blood to demolish these strongholds. As a reminder, read the following verses and consider the power and authority that Jesus has given His followers:

- *“He appointed twelve – designating them apostle – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14, 15).*
- *“They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (Mark 6:12, 13).*
- *“And these signs will accompany those who trust Me: In my name they will drive out demons” (Mark 16:17)*
- *“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’...’I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:17, 19).*

Demolish The Strongholds In The Name of Jesus

Now go back, beginning with the stronghold of Deceit, and renounce in the Name of Jesus each prevailing stronghold – those you’ve marked the symptoms as being something you have. Let the symptoms also be a trigger to guide you in remembering the type of sins you may have committed under the stronghold’s influence.

Remember, You must repent of any sins as the Holy Spirit convicts you, purposing in your heart to not repeat them.