LIVING FREE

Beth Moore
LIVING Free
Learning to Pray God’s Word

Beth Moore

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee
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INTRODUCTION

I recently had a conversation with a young woman named Sarah. She was studying *Breaking Free: Making Liberty in Christ a Reality in Life*. She called because she is so frustrated with her Christian life. She desperately wants to please God, but she feels He is not pleased with her. Sarah told me that she had struggled with anorexia, so I asked if she is a perfectionist. Of course she said yes.

Sarah wants to be perfect for God. She thinks perfection means that she should never sin. When she does sin, she gets mad at herself for being so unspiritual. Sarah told me that for years she has gone through a cycle of commitment to God, failure, anger at herself, and despair. Not surprisingly, she has been baptized several times. She is obviously a sincere young woman, desperately seeking to please God while focused on her own sin and inadequacy.

Sarah has never examined her basic beliefs about God and the Christian life. Like most others, she believes God can be pleased with human performance. Though her ideas are dressed up in biblical language, they are not unlike those of the worshipers of the Canaanite god of fire called Molech. Those ancient worshipers thought they could please and manipulate God by burning their children as sacrifices. I am afraid many Sarah’s think they can accomplish the same goals by burning themselves on some altar.

In this study I want to propose a different approach to all the Sarah’s of this world. We are going to explore the somewhat-radical idea that we cannot please God by being perfect. Even if we achieved the impossible goal of human perfection we would be not-an-inch closer to pleasing Him. What’s more, we cannot please God by focusing on our sins and inadequacies. Won’t work. Never happen. Never has. Never will.

The only focus that will change our lives is a steady gaze Godward. The more we see Him, the less we will see ourselves. Conversely, the more we obsess over our sin, the more we crowd the Savior out of our sight.

So how do we develop a Godward focus for our lives? I want to propose a two-part answer. One part involves how we see the life God desires for His children. We will explore five benefits God supplies us by His grace. We want to see these five benefits as snapshot-photographs of the life the Father has planned for us. We want to become so familiar with these benefits that we will come to desire to live the life pictured in the photos.

The second part of the answer to develop a Godward focus involves prayer and Bible study. I believe the words of Psalm 107:20, “He sent forth his word and healed them.” I believe a connection exists between God’s Word, prayer, and a changed life.

In this study we want to examine Sarah’s questions. We want to get practical—to the nuts and bolts—on the matter of pleasing God. How can we overcome persistent, defeating, devastating patterns of sin in our lives? How can we become so nonself-centered that we no longer focus on our own performance? How can we become so God-centered that we no longer want to pursue things that displease Him?
You will find this study linked to two of my previous works, *Praying God’s Word* and *Breaking Free*. *Praying God’s Word* seeks to encourage you to connect the two “sticks of dynamite” of prayer and Scripture. In this study I want to help you practice praying God’s Word.

If you have participated in the study called *Breaking Free*, you will find this study to be a follow-up. We want to get even more practical. If you have not done *Breaking Free*, I think you will find this a useful introduction to that longer Bible study. Either way, I hope you will join me on this journey. We want to grow in our calling: to be displays of His splendor.

NOTE: I have used several resources for study of Greek and Hebrew words. Definitions taken from *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* and the *Lexical Aids*¹ are enclosed in quotation marks with no reference. I have also used *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.² Words taken from *Strong’s* are enclosed in quotation marks with the word *Strong’s* in parentheses.

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Beth Moore realized at the age of 18 that God was claiming her future for full-time ministry. She conceded all rights to the Lord she had loved since childhood; however, she encountered a problem: although she knew she was “wonderfully made,” she was “fearfully” without talent.

Beth earned a degree at Southwest Texas State University, where she fell in love with Keith. After they married in December 1978, God added daughters Amanda and Melissa to their household. As if putting together puzzle pieces one at a time, God filled Beth’s path with supportive persons who saw something in her she could not. God used individuals like Marge Caldwell, John Bisagno, and Jeannette Cliff George to help Beth discover gifts of speaking, teaching, and writing. Eighteen years after her first speaking engagement, those gifts have spread all over the nation.

Beth’s ministry is grounded in and fueled by her service at her home fellowship, First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, where she serves on the pastor’s council and teaches a large Sunday School class. Beth believes that her calling is Bible literacy: guiding believers to love and live God’s Word.

Much like Beth, Julie Woodruff, writer of the leader guide material, realized a call from God to ministry while she was a sophomore in college. Over the years that calling has taken the shape of youth ministry and now women’s ministry. Julie is an active women’s ministry leader in her church and community. She currently leads a community-wide ladies Bible study of women from 20 different churches and 8 denominations. This study began in her home with three women in September 1998 and continues to grow.

Julie was responsible for beginning the women’s ministry at West Conroe Baptist Church, Conroe, Texas, where her husband was pastor over 13½ years. Julie also taught a ladies Sunday School class and Bible study there.

Julie and her husband, Sid, reside in Hendersonville, Tennessee, with their two children, Lauren and Jordan.
Week 1  Demolishing Strongholds

Day 1

A Mighty Fortress

God amazed me with people’s response to *Breaking Free: Making Liberty in Christ a Reality in Life*. The reception confirmed that Christians are struggling with powerful strongholds. Then God led me to write *Praying God’s Word*. I have since been asked more questions about Christian liberty. So in this study I want to take some of the content from both *Breaking Free* and *Praying God’s Word*, put them together, and help us apply those concepts to our lives.

What Is a Stronghold?
The term *stronghold* appears in the Old Testament almost 50 times but only once in the New Testament. We need to start with the Old both to lay a foundation and to see an important truth to guide us. The Israelites hid from their enemies in strongholds, meaning a “fortress with difficult access” (Judg. 6:2; 1 Sam. 23:14). David and others naturally compared their physical experiences with fortified strongholds to their spiritual experiences with the Lord.

Read Psalm 27:1 in the margin. Who or what does this passage claim as a stronghold?

- ☐ power  ☐ riches
- ☐ the Lord  ☐ sin

What did David conclude since the Lord was his stronghold?

- ☐ Nothing could physically injure him.
- ☐ He would never encounter difficulty.
- ☐ He did not have to be afraid.

Christ as our stronghold does not mean life will be easy or trouble free, but rejoice with me that we do not have to live in fear. God’s

With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth

(Ps. 119:13).

The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?
(Ps. 27:1).

THIS WEEK’S LESSONS
Day 1: A Mighty Fortress
Day 2: The Primary Battlefield
Day 3: What’s Wrong with Human Effort?
Day 4: The Weapons of Our Warfare
Day 5: Keep Your Focus
purposes may lead us to the path of suffering, but wherever He leads, we know He protects. He may protect from suffering or through suffering, but the more we know Him, the less we need to fear.

I love what one of my sources said about the Hebrew word for fortress in 2 Samuel 22:2. The word used is misgav, which means “refuge, stronghold.” It comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to be too strong for; to be lofty, be exalted; to lift high; to protect; to be kept safe.” What problems do you have that are too strong for God? Do you see Him as lofty and exalted?

Describe a time when God kept you safe.

______________________________________________________  
______________________________________________________

Have you watched children playing keep-away? Or, if you love basketball as I do, think of a tall player keeping the ball out of an opponent’s grasp. That pictures the phrase “to lift high; to protect.”

Oh, beloved, let us never lose sight of the protecting stronghold of God. In this study we will confront satanic strongholds, but never forget they are lies. Only the Lord God is the truth. He is our greatest stronghold. How often do you suppose He lifts and protects us? Join me in praying that our precious Father will teach us to see His sheltering hand even when that hand takes us through difficult circumstances.

In this study we’re going to pray God’s Word. See page 9 for specific help on ways to pray God’s Word.

Start by writing your own prayer praising God for being our stronghold. Use the last words of Joel 3:16 (in the margin) to begin your prayer.

Father, thank You for always being my refuge and stronghold …
How do we learn to pray God’s Word? Simply put, praying God’s Word means speaking His language. It means talking to Him using His words. Don’t waste time looking for a “formula” or “right” way to pray God’s Word back to Him. This process comes from what is in your heart and on your mind.

To get you started on this road, I will share my approach. Whenever you read your Bible, watch for passages to talk with the Father about. Especially be on the alert for any Scripture that reflects the mind of Christ toward strongholds in your life. When you are struggling with a specific issue, use a Bible concordance or topical Bible resource to search for Scriptures pertaining to your need. You may not find a detailed description of your stronghold in Scripture, but you will definitely find verses that apply. Ask God to guide you (Ps. 25:4-5) and to open your eyes to His Word (Ps. 119:18). If you’re not sure how to use Bible resources like a concordance, ask someone to help you.

When a passage speaks to you, it’s time to pray God’s Word. You can reword the passage into a prayer in any way God leads you. Here are some examples. I have referenced the passages involved.

1. Restate God’s truth, affirming your faith:  
   Father, thank You that You are always good and that Your love endures forever (1 Chron. 16:34).

2. Talk to God about passages you don’t understand:  
   Father, Your word says, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). I know that I do not live up to that standard. Please help me understand and walk like Christ.

3. Ask God for what you need:  
   “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

4. Confess sin and ask God to change your life:  
   Father, I know that You hate pride and arrogance (Prov. 8:13); yet I see the ugly face of pride in my life. Teach me today to be compassionate and humble (1 Pet. 3:8).

5. Praise God with your paraphrase of the words of Scripture:  
   I know, Lord, that You are indescribably great. You are greater than all the gods of this world (Ps. 135:5).

I intend these examples to help get you started in praying God’s Word. Please understand that your process won’t and doesn’t need to look like mine. I am only a fellow sojourner with you—not an expert. Your relationship with the Lord is unique. As you practice and become more comfortable with Scripture-prayer, your method will take on more of your personality and reflect more of your intimate relationship with the Lord.

As you get started, remember that through God’s Word and prayer we are equipped with the divine weapons He has given us to demolish strongholds. The goal is abundant life, and God can liberate anyone!
False Strongholds

Unfortunately, God is not the only stronghold available to the children of Adam. Since sin entered the race, we have been mass-producing strongholds with the capable assistance of the evil one. Thus in Scripture we see the word *stronghold* applied both to substitutes for God and the bondage they produce.

The apostle Paul explained strongholds in 2 Corinthians 10:5 (in the margin). Basically, a stronghold is any argument or pretension that “sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” The wording in the *King James Version* (margin) draws a clearer image of a stronghold. A stronghold is anything that exalts itself in our minds, pretending to be bigger or more powerful than our God. It steals our focus and causes us to feel overpowered. Controlled. Mastered.

Whether our stronghold is an addiction, unforgiveness toward a person who has hurt us, or despair over a loss, it consumes so much of our emotional and mental energy that it strangles our abundant life. Our callings remain unfulfilled, and our believing lives become ineffective. Needless to say, these are the enemy’s precise goals.

**Review the paragraph you just read. Underline the definition of a stronghold and circle statements that describe what a stronghold does.**

Did you note that a stronghold is anything that exalts itself in our minds, pretending to be bigger or more powerful than our God? Among other things did you circle that a stronghold steals our focus?

The word *stronghold* appears only once in the New Testament, but other passages convey the same idea. From your Bible carefully read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. These will be our theme verses for the study. We will examine our weapons (v. 4) later. For now let’s consider verse 5. Paul says we are to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”

Satanic strongholds invade our lives whenever we allow something to appear bigger than God. As we end this first day of study, burn into your heart the fact that strongholds come from false ideas. Though we must deal with demonic strongholds, we can be encouraged when we remember that they are only lies and deceptions.