

# **FREEDOM FIGHTING**

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**A SMALL GROUP STUDY ON STRONGHOLDS**

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# WEEK 1

## YOU WERE CREATED TO BE A CONQUEROR

Did you ever see “Lord of the Rings,” “Star Wars,” or “The Matrix?” If so, you know that the main character of each movie was engaged in a giant, cosmic, universe-altering battle between good and bad, and that these common little nobodies like Frodo and Luke Skywalker and Neo had these surprisingly important parts to play in the way it all went down. At first, they all felt that the task was too great for them (“Who, me?!”), but they grew in their conviction that what they did really mattered, and they slowly realized that they were crucial to the ultimate destiny of everything. By the end of each story, the characters realize the potential they’ve had all along.

You know, you really are just like Luke Skywalker: you probably think you don’t matter, you have trouble seeing how someone as mundane as you could have an eternal impact on anything, and you certainly can’t imagine being able to fight bigger, stronger monsters with super-human powers.

## WE’LL CHANGE OUT OF YOUR PJs, BECAUSE THIS IS YOUR WAKE UP CALL.

Not only are you called to a similar kind of quest (a cosmic good vs. evil clash of intergalactic proportions), but you, specifically, are offered the kind of authority and power that make the forces of evil quake.

*In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” “Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!”*

Luke 4:33–36

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**That kind of power isn't unique to Jesus. That power is available to anyone who knows and follows God.**

*One day...a man crippled from birth...saw Peter and John [and] asked them for money...Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.*

Acts 3:1–8

There is a larger-than-life struggle going on in this world that you can't see with your eyes. You're invited to enter to fray, and you have a destiny to not only engage, but to overcome evil. In Romans 8, Paul refers to all of Jesus' followers as "overwhelming conquerors." Daniel 11 says that people who know God will do "exploits." Jesus says in John 14 that we will do exactly the kinds of works that he did. That means healing the sick, expelling demons and basically bringing heaven to earth.

So you can finally put to death the sickly notion that "being a Christian" is all about minding your p's and q's, being the most polite person on the street, and going to church on Sunday mornings. Jesus isn't calling you into a patty-cake, saccharine lifestyle; he's drafting you into a war.

## **GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Read John 14:12. Think about how this applies to you. List what kinds of greater works Jesus might be talking about.
2. Read Psalm 144:1. What is this war? Are you honestly convinced that this war exists, or do you think these Bible people might be a little deluded?
3. If this war exists, are you willing to engage? Discuss how you feel about being drafted into the conflict.
4. Have you ever had a time you felt like a conqueror?
5. Take two minutes and pray. If you're ready, offer yourself to God for his battle. Tell Him that you want in, and that you want to be trained how to fight. If you're not quite there, ask Him for greater understanding of this battle and the part you are to play.

# WEEK 2

## KNOW YOUR ENEMY: A HISTORY

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

1 Peter 5:8

*...the accuser of our brothers...accuses them before our God day and night...*

Revelation 12:10

*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

James 4:7

OK, hate to bum you out, but yes, there really is a devil, and he is our enemy. The Bible clearly teaches us about the existence of a fallen angel named Lucifer (also called the devil or Satan) who clearly has an agenda against God and his plans for mankind. You're at war, whether you believe in the war or want to be part of it, or not. It's actually our DESTINY to deal with the enemy...and win.

But first, some "Satanic" factoids:

**His undoing was his pride.** After he said he would "be like God," he was booted out of heaven. *Isaiah 14:12-14*

**He's no slouch.** He's beautiful, wise, and powerful, and has real spiritual authority. *Ezekiel 28:12-13*

He was in the Garden of Eden, and **he tempted Eve to commit the first sin**—this is a historical fact, not just a myth. *Genesis 3:1-6*

**He also tempted Jesus** (*Matthew 4:1-11*), **and will tempt you, too.** *1 Corinthians 10:13, et al.*

**He has a giant army** of fallen angels (also called demons) who work in concert with him to undermine God's plans on earth. *Matthew 25:41*

**His title is The Prince of This World.** In other words, he is right at home on earth and operates here freely. You're on his turf. *John 12:31, Revelation 12:9*

**He is a murderer, a liar** (*John 8:45*), **and a thief** (*John 10:10*).

It might be a big leap for some of us to make, but for now let's just accept that the devil exists and that he intends to take you out. How would he do that? I mean, Satan doesn't typically appear in people's kitchens with a gun in his hand, right?

Nope. The Bible teaches that spiritual death is even more dire than physical death, and the devil means to end your spritual life. Romans 6:23 says "the wages of sin is spiritual death." That's proof that the devil and his angels intend to trap you in sin and cause your spiritual death.

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*The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.*

“The Usual Suspects”

*Roughly 9 out of 10 Americans believe in God, but just 7 out of 10 believe in the devil.*

Gallup, May 2007

But God doesn't intend to leave you this way. Remember, it's God's plan and intention that you do, indeed, wrestle with the devil and his cohorts, and overcome. Romans 8:37–39, again, refers to all believers as “overwhelming conquerors,” which sounds nuts, seeing as how our foe is a fallen angel with supernatural powers.

Some of this may be a little hard to swallow. So you may have to look at where you come down on the whole Bible/God/truth issue. If Jesus is the truth, as he claimed in John 14:6, and God's word is also truth (as Jesus claimed in John 17:17), then you have to **stop evaluating what the Bible says by drawing on your experiences, and start evaluating your experiences by what the Bible says**. That's a huge statement. You might want to spend a few moments just considering that. Living by faith and following Jesus, and all that high-sounding stuff really comes down to a matter of belief and trust. Do we really believe God's words? He says that there really is a historical devil who's invisible and wants you dead. And He says that it's your destiny to have that devil crushed under your foot. (Take a look at Romans 16:20.)

If you want to keep walking down this road with God, you'd better start here.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Spend two minutes asking God for the faith to believe him. Faith is a gift (Ephesians 2:8), and God wants to give it to you. Ask Him for the faith to know that the scriptures are authoritative, and that your experience is secondary. Discuss with the group anything you are having difficulty believing.
2. What have your thoughts about the devil been? How does the Bible's description of him differ with your assumptions? Ultimately, which is right?
3. Read Romans 8:37–39 again. Many self-described Christians believe that God will keep them safe from the devil. Does that sound like being an overwhelming conqueror to you? What does Romans 8 mean when it says that neither demons nor any other powers will be able to separate you from God's love? Why is that mentioned in this passage?
4. Ask God, along with your small group, to help you oppose Satan and his fallen angel buddies. “If he opposes them, and I belong to Him, I oppose them, too.” God trains our hands for war and our fingers for battle, according to Psalm 144:1. Ask Him to start training you. Discuss ways you can personally start training this week.

# WEEK 3

## BODY AND SPIRIT: HOW AND WHY YOU CAN BE ATTACKED

If you follow Jesus and believe the Bible, the reality is that it is us versus the devil and his fallen angels. And part of this reality is that Satan wants to steal from you and destroy you (those are Jesus' words, in John 10:10). But how does he do that? Ray guns? Mind control? Voodoo?

The Bible doesn't leave you in the dark about such things. It tells you that the devil uses temptation\* as a weapon (Genesis 3, Matthew 4, et al.), and that, when you choose to side with the devil and go toward sin,\* you become a party to our own demise (since sin produces death, Romans 6:23). Now, as to the mechanics of the whole thing...

### **\*Stronghold Definitions**

**Temptation:** *an attractive lure based on the lie that disobeying God will end in personal pleasure or fulfillment; temptations are aimed at your flesh*

**Sin:** *Going against God's plan, purposes or opinion*

**Flesh:** *Bible-y word for your body and its fallen, sin-ward inclination*

Think about your body—your skin and bones and hair and fat and teeth and liver. Your body (or “flesh,”\* as it's often referred to in the Bible) doesn't have the ability to connect with God. That is to say, if you decided to give your life to Jesus, your body didn't magically transform (as your spirit did). You still had your dad's nose and a mole on your left shoulder. There was no physical manifestation of your spiritual transformation. That's because your body doesn't operate on God's spiritual wavelength (as contrasted to your spirit). It operates on a very low-level plane, the same plane where fatigue and hunger and your sex drive exist.

Your spirit is altogether different. It's pure and perfect in Christ (Ephesians 5:27). It's that part of you that hears God's voice—that small nudge that speaks God's truth to you (à la Revelation 1:10). Your spirit is that part of you that feels confident calling God “Father” (Romans 8:15). It's also the instrument God uses to convict you of lies that you believe (Proverbs 20:27). And when God thinks of YOU, he doesn't imagine a photograph of your face and body; he thinks of your spirit. That's how He knows you (2 Corinthians 5:16–17). Your spirit is a fine-tuned antenna that can hear and speak to God.

Which do you think would be easier for a demon to influence: your spirit—which is “seated with Christ” (Ephesians 2:6), perfect in God's sight (Ephesians 4:1), and communes with God continually—or your body, which starts drooling whenever it sees an ad for the Big Mac Snack Wrap®?

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Yeah. Not a hard call. Your body (not your spirit) is tempted by sexual promiscuity, overeating, laziness and general self-gratification. That's because bodies are fluent in the language of temptation. In fact, bodies often feel flattered by temptation! They love it! So that's where the enemy directs all temptation. Paul, who wrote a majority of the New Testament, describes a war between his heart and his flesh in Romans 7 that's pretty illuminating. He ends the section by saying that he just needs God to save him from his body.

Your body is your greatest vulnerability. It's where Satan directs his attacks. When you feel tempted to fear, it's an appeal to your flesh. When you're tempted to harbor resentment, it's an appeal to your flesh. When you're tempted to feel rejected, it's an appeal to your flesh. Each of these thoughts is a bullet straight out of the devil's gun, and if you agree with any of those anti-God lies, you're going to be helping Satan destroy you.

Each of us is tempted in a myriad of ways: you may be tempted to lust based on a billboard, a celebrity, a movie, or just seeing someone good-looking on the street. You may be tempted to fear based on a news report, a friend's harrowing story, or a fleeting thought. You may be tempted to steal whenever you think you won't get caught. You may be tempted to feel self-righteous whenever you see anybody else doing something you deem unacceptable. **There are a million and more ways to be tempted, and Satan is watching closely to see which you fall for again and again.** His forces have strategies for taking each of us down, and stealing life, peace and love from us. Remember, he's an accuser, and he knows your weak spot is your flesh.

So, instead of relying on your flesh, which is weak, you should dial into your spirit. It's your strength and security headquarters because God's spirit, which lives in every believer, resides there. Think of it: if your arm gets cut off in an accident, your relationship with God doesn't decrease by virtue of having less body mass. Again, your body is not the location of your spirituality; you know God via your spirit.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

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| 1. Why would Satan attack you, personally? Why would his winning victories in your life even matter to him? What does he have to gain? | 4. Read Mark 14:38. How is Jesus contrasting the body and the spirit? Rephrase "willing" and "weak." What is he saying, exactly? |
| 2. How could you be made less susceptible to temptation? How can you watch out for temptation in your lives?                           | 5. Take two minutes to pray as a group precisely what Jesus tells us to in Mark 14:38.   |
| 3. Where have you repeatedly fallen victim to temptation and the devil's lies?   |  |

# WEEK 4

## HOW DID JESUS DEAL WITH THE DEVIL?

Jesus was put in exactly the same position you're in: He had a body, so he had all the fleshly temptations you do. That means he was under very real attack by the devil. The books of Matthew, Mark and Luke in the New Testament of the Bible all give us blow-by-blow accounts of Jesus being tempted by Satan. Jesus also had the experience, as we all do, of seeing people around him attacked by the devil.

Jesus knew that he was in a cosmic battle. He knew that the devil wanted to take him out. And he knew that he was vulnerable in his body. So let's look at what Jesus did to beat temptation.

It's comforting to know that Jesus didn't call on some secret favors from heaven, or pull off his robe exposing a superhero uniform. He was "tempted in every way," just as we are (Hebrews 4:15), and the bullets were real. The way he made it against the devil is the same way we're supposed to make it, because we're supposed to do the same stuff that Jesus did (John 14:12).

Here's a Cliff's Notes version of what we see Jesus doing when he encounters the devil:

**He leaned into the Bible.** Even Jesus didn't think his spirituality or faith was so great that he could take on the devil without the scriptures. He knew that God's truth is irrefutable, and quoted the Bible liberally.

**He didn't trust the cravings of his body.** He fasted regularly, and said that deliberately avoiding food for the sake of praying helped fight demons. He also, famously, didn't have sex for 33+ years of his life. Um, wow.

When Jesus or someone else was being attacked/tempted, He spoke directly to the devil and his evil forces. **He wasn't intimidated at all.**

**He simply commanded evil spirits to leave.** He recognized their activity and didn't stand for it. He removed them from the premises.

**He kept at it.** Dealing with demons was a normal part of Jesus' life, and he even said that he would continue to deal with them. He knew that being in relationship with God meant opposing whatever opposes God, as well as loving what God loves.

**Source material:** *Luke 4:1-13, Mark 9:29, Luke 4:35, Luke 13:32*

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It's a really good idea to be familiar with the list from the previous page, so that you can have the same ammunition Jesus had. If these tactics are good enough for Jesus, they're certainly good enough for us.

Jesus also freely and regularly gave others the authority to deal with evil spirits the same way he did. Mark 5:13 and Luke 9:1 tell us so. As a matter of fact, Jesus said that spiritual battle would be one of the unmistakable marks of people who followed him: *And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons.* Mark 16:17

That's a challenging statement. So, do you believe? Or do you think that mystical junk is reserved for a specific kind of kook? Jesus didn't seem to think so. There are many stories of Jesus encountering the devil and his forces, and many more stories of Jesus' followers doing the same. You've been given example after example on how to fight this battle, and you're encouraged to engage. Our activity, or lack thereof, matters. **Following Jesus into battle will mean the difference in our own freedom/salvation journey, as well as that of the many people we'll touch with our lives.** If it was too much for you to handle, Jesus wouldn't invite you in. But He does.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Read these verses and list the evil spirits mentioned in each: Numbers 5:14, Isaiah 61:3, 1 Samuel 16:14, Mark 9:17, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 John 4:6.
2. What do you think about memorizing Bible verses? Have you considered that they can be used in fighting the devil? Have any verses in the study so far made you stop and think that they'd be useful, like John 14:12? Share with the group which one you'll try to memorize this week.
3. What's your experience with fasting, if any? Have you ever considered fasting for your spiritual health?
4. Have you ever heard of people having personal encounters with evil spirits? How do Jesus' tactics match up to what you've heard?
5. Take two minutes to pray as a group and ask God to show you where the devil is at work around you, and how you can start to implement Jesus' tactics in opposing that work.

# WEEK 5

## WE MUST HEAR THE SPIRIT'S VOICE

Let's review. You were created for an epic clash of good vs. evil. You have a real enemy who wants to eat you for brunch. He attacks you by luring your flesh into agreeing with him and walking away from God. And Jesus has shown us that we don't have to lose this battle. Moreover, he's given us the power (and instruction) to win. But there is a very important caveat.

**What you don't want to do is to run out, looking for a fight to pick with the devil, and start slingin' around your presumed spiritual authority.** (You particularly want to avoid doing this if you aren't a bona-fide Jesus-follower. See Acts 19:13–16 for a fascinating and sobering story that illustrates this quite well.) You want to do what Jesus did: hear and obey God's voice.

*I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the father does the son also does.*

Jesus' words from John 5:19

Jesus didn't just strut around doing whatever he felt like doing. There were even times when he didn't heal everybody (Mark 6:5). He was extremely dialed in to what the Spirit of God was saying to him, hanging on his Father's every word, while constantly trying to silence his own flesh. He was listening to God's voice, which is what you're going to have to do, too. Whoa.

You might think that hearing God's voice is reserved for people named Jeremiah, or people who shake tambourines in church services. Not true! In fact, if you even believe in Jesus, you have heard God's voice. Nobody comes to God unless God invites them by his spirit, they hear him, and they accept the invitation. So you can hear God, and indeed you must.

We all have our ideas of what's good and helpful in any given situation, but only God knows what's really going on, and what's really needed. You have to be open to letting Him lead us by his spirit. That sounds maddeningly ambiguous and mystical, but there's a reality behind the notion that, if you're quiet, and ask Him to speak to you, and commit to obey, he will speak in a way that is unmistakable. Now, faith will still be required—you'll still have to take a risk to some degree—but you can only know what to do if God's spirit speaks to you and leads you.

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None of this is to say that all of your notions are evil, or that a common-sense solution is always wrong, but you must wait and be sensitive. God always retains veto power, and we'd be well advised to double-check any of our battle tactics with God's spirit who lives in us. (*Tip: if you're new to hearing God's voice, your best bet is to run what you think you're hearing by a seasoned Christ-follower who also hears God's voice. They're unparalleled resources for newbies.*)

And if you just so happen to hear His voice? **If He actually prompts you in your spirit to move, or act, or speak in such a way that you do battle with evil spirits, obey him!** (You might have already guessed that's the best response to hearing God's voice...)

*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...*  
Psalm 95:7–8

Jesus always obeyed the Father. He didn't have special powers that you don't have, and he didn't have access to God that you don't have. But He did have this going for him: he always, always, always obeyed. That means He could hear God's voice even more clearly, and he'd developed a history with his father that gave him incredible confidence—not in himself, but in God's spirit.

Again, you have every opportunity to live the kind of life Jesus did (1 John 2:6), and you can deal with demons and all sorts of evil. But you have to learn how to hear God's voice, just like Jesus did.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

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| 1. Do you feel like you've ever "heard God's voice?" If so, describe that experience. If not, describe what happened inside you when you first believed in Jesus' claims. | 3. Why do you think hearing God's voice goes hand-in-hand with doing spiritual battle?   |
| 2. Read John 8:47. What is God's expectation for his followers? Do you agree with His?  | 4. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). Ask God as a group to grow your faith by teaching you how to hear his voice better and better. |

# WEEK 6

## RECLAIMING YOUR GROUND: HOW TO'S

Here's the best-case scenario: You've been processing through this study with your small group for the past five weeks, and you're getting over your initial feelings that spiritual battles are only for Jedi Masters. You're seeing that God gives you power to deal with evil forces, and that walking in concert with God's spirit is THE way he designed this process to work.

Okay...so what? What if you're ready to get after it? What do you do?

Well the best practice in the world for would-be warriors is fighting for your own freedom. **Your battle headquarters are in your own heart, so making sure that you are pure and well-defended will make you the best defender of others.** The opposite is also true: if you're imprisoned by lies, give in to every temptation, and are basically a pin-cushion for the arrows of the enemy, you're in no shape to even hope for fighting the evil outside of you.

Here are four steps to pursue as you walk out your own freedom journey. They all begin with the letter R, which is of no particular consequence, but a delightful coincidence nonetheless.

*This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength..."*

Isaiah 30:15

*Blessed is the man whose...delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

Psalm 1:1-3

### Repent

Many of us think of a long-haired preacher yelling at people on the street when we hear this word. We might feel guilt and shame. But repentance is simply the way we call out to God to help us turn away from our sin. To repent is to admit that we've done something wrong or believed some lie, and to ask God to rescue us.

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*I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths of the grave.*  
Psalm 86:12–13

*...thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him!*  
2 Corinthians 2:14

## Replace lies with truth

Whatever it is that attacks us, there is a truth antidote in the scriptures. Go find a concordance (there are great ones online) and start looking up verses that talk about your problem areas. What does the Bible say about shame? Lust? Forgiveness? Bitterness? It's all there. We've got to turn away from whatever we've believed, and start agreeing with God's truth. Start plowing up your heart and planting some truth seed in there. It always produces a good harvest.

## Rejoice in God

People who get set free from prison don't have to be persuaded to praise their rescuer. When you get a taste of God's victory in your life, you'll want to sing about it. So, do it! Worship of God (whether through song, meditating on the Bible, or praying to him) is one of our strongest weapons against the enemy. Satan can't stand worship, and leaves the premises wherever worship occurs. Learn to fight by rejoicing.

## Repeat the pattern

The only thing more enjoyable than chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream is sharing chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream and watching someone's eyes light up who's never had that creamy goodness. Similarly, being set free is only accentuated by helping to set other people free. All of your friends and family, whether they believe in Jesus or not, are under attack by the devil. And God enlists everyone to be freedom fighters. Keep your eyes and ears open to what God's spirit says about the people in your life, and help them into the clear. God wants you to be an ambassador of his Kingdom's life, love and liberty. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

**Once you can recognize our enemy, resist his temptations, and burn him out of your life with repentance, truth and praise, you can turn and start rescuing others from the bondage of sin.** With Jesus as our model, and the spirit of God as our guide, we can receive the calling of conqueror.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Read Isaiah 55:8–13. What is it that verse 11 says will produce all this great stuff in your life? Trying harder? Therapy? Better fitting jeans?
2. Look over Romans 8:31–39 again. Does all this make any more sense than at the beginning of this study? What questions do you still have?
3. Which R is hardest for you? Why?
4. Ask God, with your small group, to show you:
  - Who in your life needs defending from the enemy's attacks
  - How you can be a freedom fighter for their sake
  - To help you continually be aware of areas you need more freedom
5. Talk through how you're feeling about the above issues. Is there something practical you can do, or should you just pray? Can you pray now with your small group for those people?
6. Thank God for setting you free, for outfitting you for battle, and for making you like him: a freedom fighter.