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HOW TO CONQUER YOUR PERSONAL DEMONS (PART 2)

2 Corinthians Series | *2 Corinthians 10:1-5*

[PRAYER] Lord, I know that we all have struggles inside of our hearts that we wrestle with regularly. But Lord, I just feel for those who seem overwhelmed at times. They just feel like they're struggling constantly. It's a daily struggle for some people as they're trying to deal with health issues or emotional issues or issues revolving around work or family or just in their own hearts. Lord, I pray that you would break through today and provide some special grace from all of us. We all need this, but especially those people that are feeling like they're overwhelmed in one way or another and they need help. Lord, I thank you that you've provided us a church to be a comfort and an encouragement to each other. I thank you for my brothers and sisters who are here. It's an encouragement to me. So I ask that you would encourage us all as we fellowship and we meet at the church together. Help us see past the behaviors that we see or the looks on the outside to what's going on in hearts. Let's be sensitive as we talk to each other, as we interact with each other, that we might be able to be used by you to pass on blessing and encouragement. Now Father, we're going to open your word and we ask that you would teach us through it. Help us understand it in very practical ways that can impact our week this week. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

In our book of 2 Corinthians we come to 2 Corinthians 10 where we talk about strongholds. I call them personal demons, referring to personal demons in the metaphorical sense as these inner struggles that we all have. These are these dark places in our heart that seem to attract our thoughts. They seem to distract us from what God would have for us. These are the things that rob us of the privilege of enjoying God in a powerful way and really enjoying life. God wants us to enjoy life. But inside each one of our hearts we have these things that get in the way. And this passage takes us to those places today. They're called strongholds in 2 Corinthians.

It's something that we all face. This isn't just for super-Christians. This is something for all of us. We need to be able to address the challenges that we have because they rob us of the joy, they rob us of the peace, they rob us of the love that God wants us to have. So as we go through this passage today, I trust that God will speak to you in a particular way to help you understand how to overcome. We're talking today about how to conquer those personal demons. That's our goal today to talk about some how-to steps.

As we do, I want to look at our passage for today. If you stand with me, I'm going to read 2 Corinthians 10:1-5. You can open your Bibles and follow along in your own text. I hope you're

carrying your Bibles like our children are bringing their Bibles. I hope you have yours and you can read along, mark in your Bible, write notes in it. That would be great.

In 2 Corinthians 10:1-5 it says this: *By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they (these spiritual weapons) 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.*

You may be seated.

Well this is true confession time. I really don't know how to fight. I'm not a real good fighter. When I was in middle school I got into a fight and I punched the guy in the nose and I broke my little finger. I had a cast up to here. To this day I can't remember what the guy looks like, who he was, why we fought, or anything. I don't remember anything about it. All I remember is I broke my finger. So I learned that when I fight I get hurt. That's all I learned about that episode.

We live in a world where it's kind of dangerous sometimes. So I think it might be kind of good for me to learn some tactics or strategies if someone were to attack me.

I heard Jacob in our church here is ten years old and he has a black belt. I think it's a third level black belt in karate. And he's also a teacher. He's a master or something. He's ten years old. I'm thinking what a great opportunity. Because I'm sure some of you are black belts, but of course we don't know that. We don't normally have these conversations about martial arts and so on. But I can ask a ten year old. So I said to him, “Jacob, I need some advice. If I'm attacked, I want some ideas about what I should I do when I'm attacked. What should I do when someone comes at me?” He looks at me straight in the eye and he says his: “Run and yell loud.” I'm thinking the wisdom of a ten year old. I can do that! I'm telling you those words are probably going to save me someday from hurting myself because I'm going to run and yell loud. Ten years old. I just love that.

Now today we're going to look at the scriptures. I want you to see that the battle strategies or the war strategies that are there are strategies that you can use. These are things you can put into practice right away.

The word 'war' is used in the passage. That's why we call it spiritual warfare. But I don't want you to think these tactics are for super Christians who go out and cast out demons. We do that. If you have a problem with a demon in your house or something, we will come and we will help you with that. We will speak against demons in the power of Jesus' name and we will fight spiritual warfare on a spiritual level. We will actively do that. But that's not what we're talking about today. We're talking about the spiritual warfare that takes place inside of your own heart. The spiritual warfare that takes place inside of you because these thoughts that we have rob us of the blessing. We have to deal with them.

The way we deal with them is really important. Because the passage today as we look at it in 2 Corinthians 10 says – *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.* Well if you think of the weapons of this world, what are they? Well it depends what the battle is.

If you've been hurt in the past and that has created a stronghold in your life and these thoughts come out and "oh no, I might get hurt again," you might have the temptation to control things. You start controlling your life, you start controlling other people, and your control issues starts damaging relationships. It becomes a stronghold in your life.

There are some people who feel out of control in your life and so they then resort to self-medicating and some kind of solution to their trials. So their internal stronghold may be an addiction of some kind that robs them of the blessing that God would have for them. There's some people who their stronghold is for one reason or another their withdraw. They withdraw from life because they don't have the courage to step forward. Or maybe there's a stronghold because something bad has happened that they've done something wrong or they've failed in life in one way or another. So the guilt plagues them from moving forward.

Those are the strongholds that we have. The world uses all kinds of things to challenge them. Anger episodes. I talked about control or self-medicating, and withdraw. There are all kinds of solutions that happen in the world and they assume they're put out there as the thing to do.

What the Bible is saying here is there are different kinds of weapons, spiritual weapons, that we need to consider. Because as Christians we think differently in our lives. We respond differently to the challenges.

Now I want to take you to another passage. A passage you're probably more familiar with is the passage in Ephesians 6 that talks about the weapons. I want you to look at some of them. As Paul is writing he creates this analogy of armor and he puts the word that's the weapon with a piece of armor. But notice salvation is going to be your key thing that's going to help you fight the battles. Because when you're saved, when you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you have the internal strength available to you to fight the battle.

This *breastplate of righteousness*. Do the right thing. We'll come back to this, but when you do the right thing you start taking steps in the right direction. Good things can happen in this area of spiritual battles inside of your heart. Truth is very important. Having the truth to fight the lies. I would suggest that every stronghold in our lives has as its core some kind of a lie. So we must face it with the truth. Faith is this ability to go forward not having all of the answers. I'm going to trust God in the midst of this. Walking on the oceans, like that song that we sung. Just having the trust to step out there and let God work in our lives.

The *sword of the Spirit*, the Bible says, which is the word of God, of course gives us a new way of thinking. And this *feet* protected by the gospel, this sense of readiness. Always ready because of what God has done for us. Those become the armor of God and they are different weapons that we must get used to. We have to start using these weapons because as we use them they become more useful in our lives.

Now if we look back at the passage in 2 Corinthians 10, I want you to see the words that are used here because they describe for us what's actually happening inside of our hearts. The idea of stronghold is like an outpost. The stronghold can be caused by a lot of different things. Often they're caused by the sins of other people. If you've been hurt deeply in your life, then you're at risk of having a stronghold in your life. They could be caused by some kind of a desire or something inside of you that's gone wrong.

I regularly tell young people you cannot have as your primary goal in life pleasure. If you believe that life is all about pleasure... And there are a lot of young people who believe that. "I just want to have fun." That's their goal in life. "I want to have fun." If you believe your primary goal is pleasure, it will take you in all kinds of bad places, outside of boundaries that God has for us. Our primary goal is not to be on the cruise ship of life. Our primary goal in life is to be on the battleship with a mission that God has given us. That's how we become responsible disciples of Christ, to recognize that mission that God has given us. So pleasure can become this stronghold in a person's life, leading them to some addiction of pleasure of one sort or another.

These strongholds then lodge themselves on the battlefield of their hearts and out of them come all these little thoughts. It's out of the strongholds come the thoughts that need to be taken captive. They come from the strongholds. So if you've failed in life and you feel guilty about that, then you've got these thoughts – "I better not try again," "I'm going to fail again," or "I'm just inadequate. Nobody really likes me." Whatever. These lies start coming out of the stronghold and the Bible is saying you want to take captive these thoughts. How are we going to do it? God's going to come and demolish these strongholds, ball it up, get rid of it.

But also *demolish arguments*. Arguments are logical thinking that gets us into trouble. I believe everybody is internally consistent. Their logic leads them to the conclusion that they have. So a person who does a wrong thing, if you got into their mind and followed their logic, you can see why they did this stupid thing or this wrong thing or this sinful thing that they did. A person who has addiction, you can follow their logic and see why they're addicted. The problem then is the logic is wrong. So we need to demolish the logic or the arguments that lead a person in that direction.

In *every pretension*. Now pretension is a false claim that we assume to be true. So we take a claim that's false and start living by it, then we end up in the wrong place. Those pretensions get us into trouble. Notice what they do. *The arguments and the pretensions set us up against the knowledge of God*. So if we get to know God and better understand who He is, then it will help us to remove some of these arguments and pretensions.

Notice the next statement is that we're going to *take every thought*. Now the thoughts come out of the strongholds. This is why if you go to a counselor (and many of us would benefit from going to a counselor), the counselor often says, "Okay, so you're having trouble in this area. Let's go back and find out where that started in your life." I'm not sure we always need to go back and figure out where things started, but the point they're trying to do is where's the stronghold. You've got these thoughts and you've got these problems. What's going on deeper inside of your heart that's creating the problem? Because if we can identify the stronghold and

help you allow God to help blast it away, then these thoughts that you have that come from that are going to diminish and we're going to take them captive. So taking captive the thoughts is important. But don't miss that last part which says we want to make them obedient to Christ. When we make our *thoughts obedient to Christ*.

Now I believe in this passage we are faced with this challenge. Paul is encouraging us to deal with this big challenge that's in our heart where we wrestle with stuff. We need to know how to wrestle with it in ways that are most appropriate and beneficial to our lives. How are we going to do that? I think if we look at our lives we see that these strongholds come in different ways.

Let me give you some examples. Let's look at the past. If in the past you've been hurt by someone, a stronghold could be a bitterness that grows inside of you that causes you now to have thoughts about other people that if they do some small thing wrong you have an exaggerated response. That's what bitterness does. It exaggerates your anger. So a little trigger gets a big response. It's a stronghold. Let's imagine in the past that you've stolen or done something terrible and you believe it's unforgivable or something. Well that's a lie of Satan. So it creates a stronghold that causes you to feel guilty continually. And because you feel guilty then it hinders your confidence to move forward. Those are past kind of things that lead to strongholds.

What about the future ones? The future ones that say, "Oh you realize you're never going to have your dream job," or "you're never going to have the money that you thought you were going to have," or "the marriage that you thought you were going to have is not going to happen." So you have these expectations. What creeps in then? It's disappointment. "I'm disappointed with life." It's a stronghold. So now there's a discouragement and disappointment that regularly happens. If you're looking to the future and hoping you're going to get well and you're sick and you're not getting well and you're relying on some expectation to get well, then it can rob you of the joy that you can experience now even while you're sick. The point is there are things in the future that can rob us of the joy and the life that God has for us. Those become strongholds in our life.

And then there's those things in the present where we have to make a decision. We don't like the decision we have to make. We have to make the decision, but it's hard. It's really hard to make right decisions. So I can say go out and do the right thing. You know that knowing what the right thing is first of all hard. And then doing it sometimes is complicated. It's not easy to do what's right sometimes, so you're trying to figure that out. As you are (it's really hard to know), there's a frustration that's created. So you might just withdraw, give up. So the thoughts come and say, "This isn't worth it. I can't do this. I'm going to escape from this somehow." So you see how those strongholds create these thoughts and it creates a problem in our lives.

I want to share with you three weapons of the spiritual battles. I want to get to the how-to. How are you going to deal with this? What are you going to do when these thoughts come? The reality is here's what happens. You're lying there in bed at night and you're trying to go to sleep and the thoughts come. You wish you could get rid of them. But what am I going to do? Think happy thoughts. Or do something else. But what happens is you keep going back to the thoughts. It's hard to get rid of them. This is a real battle, a war that's going on inside of our hearts that robs us of the blessing, robs us of sleep sometimes, robs us of our health, makes us feel sick. All kinds of

bad things happen. It just corrodes our well being. We've got to be able to fight that. I'm going to give you three suggestions that come from God's word that are battles.

The first one is to make the hard choice to do what's right. I just have to stop there. As I talk to people (I don't want this to sound too superficial or trite), I work with people who are in really difficult situations. Doing the right thing is hard. It's going to cost money, it's going to make their reputations at stake, all kinds of things. If the right thing for you to do is check into a rehab when nobody else knows you have a problem, that is a really hard thing to do. It's really hard to ask someone to forgive you when you've done the wrong thing, especially when that person has been taking advantage of you and continues to do so. It's really hard. Or to forgive someone who's continuing to mess with you. It is not easy to do the right thing. That's why I say here make the hard choice to do what's right.

This is a walk of faith. This is where we step out, we take the shield of faith, and we do what's right even though we don't know what's going to happen or we know that bad things are going to happen when we do the right thing. We're going to do what's right because we trust that God's going to work in this in the midst. It is hard to do the right thing. But that's one of the ways that you can fight the spiritual warfare.

When you do the right thing, even though there are other things going on, there's a sense of peace that you have that I'm doing the right thing. My conscience is clear before God. I've still got to deal with other problems that aren't resolved yet, but I'm doing the right thing. Something happens on the inside that allows you to fight the battle on spiritual ground using a weapon that's not like the world's weapon. It's a weapon that's this breastplate of righteousness. It's doing the right thing.

There's a story in the Old Testament. A story of Cain and Abel, the first two kids, sibling conflict going on between them. God had outlined how sacrifices would be given to Him. There will be animal sacrifices. But what happened is Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. Abel had access to animals. Cain had access to fruits and vegetables. So when it came time to bring an offering they both brought from what they did. Now Cain's sacrifice was not accepted. I don't know about you, but I can feel his argument, his logic. He's saying, "Look. I do fruit. I don't do animals. I'm bringing this to you. I'm giving this to you. God, you're not accepting my gift." So the logic is working for him, but God says no. God doesn't accept his argument. So Cain gets angry about it. I can feel the anger because I understand the logic. It doesn't make it right.

So God is the counselor and steps in and so God is counseling Cain. He says these words to him. The Lord says to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, here's what happens when you don't do what's right. You just got to get this. Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it." So what is our first principle here when it comes to fighting the spiritual battle? Do the right thing even though it's hard.

A second weapon for the spiritual battle is to renew your mind on God's word. So you want to regularly be getting God's word into you because you learn how to think differently. You get to

know what the knowledge of God is. It's surprising sometimes who God is and how He meets us in our lives. That's why Paul writes to the Romans and says, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Because the logic that you have that's getting you to this place where you're doing the wrong thing, you're having these bad thoughts is wrong logic. It's just not good. So he says let's just change this by renewing the mind.

A third weapon for the spiritual battle is to pray in the Holy Spirit. This isn't just the prayer that says, "Oh God, thank you for this day, thank you for this food." Those are good prayers to pray. I'm all for that. This is the prayer that says, "God, I don't know what to pray. I'm stuck in this situation. I need your help." That's the prayer that we pray in the Spirit. Because the Bible says that *the Spirit prays for us groaning that can't be uttered*. There's a sense of which the Spirit takes over us and it empowers us.

We need to come before God in the midst of that spiritual battle and pray in the Holy Spirit that God would do this work. "God, I just give you my heart. Do something here. I just ask you that the power that you used to raise Jesus Christ from the dead do this right now in this situation to enable me to get out of whatever or escape from whatever or to do what I need to do or whatever it is," because the temptation comes, the thoughts come and they take us down a bad path. We need to pray in the Holy Spirit that God would rescue us, that God would deliver us, fight the battle that's there in the midst of the challenge.

When Jesus was in agony and wrestling with God about the cross and suffering and weeping in the garden, He says to His disciples these words: "*Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation.*" That would have been a good idea for Peter to be praying because in a little bit he's going to have his own temptation that he can't handle. *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.* Why? Because *the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*. That is so true in our lives. My flesh is weak. My spirit is willing, but it looks like my flesh is winning here. "God, I just need your spiritual strength to help me move through this rather challenging, difficult battle inside of my heart, inside of my mind that needs to be addressed." The battle is fought inside our hearts before it's fought outside.

I think one of the ways that we can understand this whole idea a little bit more is for you to hear it from other people besides me. So I'm going to ask Diane to come and share a testimony about her as she's wrestling with this idea and how God is working in her life. And then Nancy is going to follow her and share as well. Let's listen to them.

[Diane] Good morning, everyone. My name is Diane, for those of you who don't know me. It took a while for me to come up here. Pastor Scott asked me many times to come up, but I didn't think I had the words or the testimony. It's not like life hasn't been exciting in good and bad ways, but I kind of feel like this particular topic brought me to the point where I had a lot to say. In other words, I kind of say that God said this is the time. So here I am.

So until about three years ago, my life consisted of solely of pleasing others. Basically it was what did you want, how did you want it, when did you want it, and, last but not least, did I do it right. My stronghold of fear, of disapproval revolved around certain people who I had made my

gods. My life has completely and utterly lived on the outside of myself. I spent so much time concentrating on the needs of these two particular people in my life that I had become a master at ignoring my own needs more than once.

It was to the point where I had a constant thought that if I passed in front of a mirror literally I would be invisible. I would literally see nothing but a top hat and white gloves. To me that meant that I was a servant. I basically served and did whatever they wanted. I had been trained from childhood and well into adulthood to meet these particular people's needs in order to be recognized, in order to be patted on the back, and most importantly not to stir up their anger. Therefore my stronghold was taking place.

This stronghold, my fear of disapproval and anger, led to a crippling form of anxiety. I had lost all control of my life for basically what life. Which led to a loss of hope about my career, my future, my dreams, of which I had many. I was hanging by a thread by these two particular people who at any point had the power to cut the thread.

There's something about living your life for others that not only makes you feel invisible, but leaves you feeling like a balloon with a string attached but not tied to anything. So the balloon just floats and floats with no direction or control of its own. That's exactly what putting your trust and dependence in the flesh feels like when you're at the whim and mood of people in your life. It is building your house on sand and not on a solid rock of an unchanging God.

It wasn't that I didn't have needs or dreams of my own; it was more like I didn't know what to do with them. I didn't have the courage to live it. So it wasn't like I was at peace serving others. It was more out of fear and a need to manipulate the relationships by doing what they wanted. But in fact I grew increasingly anxious and restless in searching for the One that created the need, that void in the first place. I was filling it the wrong way.

It was those very needs and dreams, however, that never ever let me feel at peace in the overly submissive role I was playing. I knew that this suppression of my soul to placate others, this stronghold was killing me softly.

I'll say "but God," and I'll say it again. "But God." Because He never gave up. Scripture says – *But before I formed you in the womb I knew you.* I had a purpose that I was not fulfilling and God was not going to let me go on the way that I was.

At one point the painful relationships I was in far surpassed any little crumb of happiness that it gave me. The crumbling anxiety started to take over and I was brought to my knees in surrender to God. I had to get back the control that I was taking. Yes, I was controlling in that kind of way in the form of being a victim, and therefore let God have His way instead.

Here's where the true will for me started. It meant giving up society's view of me as a perfect daughter, a perfect daughter-in-law, and suburban soccer mom. It meant giving up a certain lifestyle and pairing down in a material way. It was scary and oftentimes embarrassing. In fact embarrassing in many levels. When people around you in your neighborhood knew you in a certain way, in a certain role, in a certain stature, to them it looked like I had failed because I had

walked away from it all. But to the people that mattered, my new crew of Christ-centered people (you know who you are, some of you), I had become more real, more down to earth, more approachable because I had nothing to hide. To these people I had won.

But most important I was no longer the invisible person in the mirror. I could stop and look in the mirror and actually see and touch me. No more top hat and gloves. God works in mysterious ways. He really does. I finally realized I was free, truly free when I let God have His way. He wants it all. He wants all of us. In return He frees us from our strongholds. He frees us all.

Are my struggles over? By all means no. Anxiety still rears its head from time to time, but when I resist the devil he flees every time. I know who wins and it keeps me from fleshly condemnation when others try to take me there. Instead I am full of hope and peace that I never thought I could ever possess.

I can only hope that this testimony gives somebody somewhere who hears this some hope that I possess today. If nothing else, remember this: Matthew 19 says – *Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will have eternal life. Many who are first will be last in the future, and many who are last will be first in the future.* So hold on and God bless. Thank you.

[Nancy] I love that Diane finally got up and shared her testimony. I've been waiting myself for a long time for her to share with you guys.

I'm thankful that Scott asked me to share a bit too. I think what I want to speak on is just how subtle strongholds can enter our lives and enter. So that's going to be my story a little bit. Two examples I'm going to share with you, not specific in details necessarily with my life, but just how subtle things can happen and how the enemy is so sneaky.

So one that I want you know about me is I am someone who loves people and I care about people. I love to serve and help, maybe to a fault. So what happens sometimes for me is relationships become so important to me that they actually can (or have in the past – I've been working really hard to change this around) end up taking position above God first on my list.

When I was young I thought I'm doing all the right things. I'm caring about people and I'm loving and I'm putting them first, so I must not be a selfish person. And then as I started to grow in the Lord I realized in fact I am really selfish because these people, these relationships are taking position before God in my life. So I had to really have my eyes open to that. I had things a little bit out of sync. So for me that did become a stronghold. I guess I would describe that as confusion. I was so confused about what needed to come first in my life and I was letting people and relationships take priority over my relationship with God. So God had to open my eyes to that. So that's number one. Very subtle. The enemy is sneaky like that. I thought I was doing the right thing, but it still wasn't right in God's eyes because He needed to be first in my life.

Two for me, something that was really subtle is that I lived a lot when I was younger by these words "if only." What I mean by that is I would think, "If only my hair would look great today, things would be right." "If only my skin would stop breaking out (and I'm in my thirties), things

would be alright.” “If only my yard looked like my neighbor’s yard, things would be alright.” “If only my home was little bit nicer.” “If only my legs were a little bit longer and leaner.” “If only my clothes would fit right.” Whatever. I’m sure you guys have some “if only”.

But what that was doing was robbing me from what was true. And that was that God saw me, as Diane said, fearfully and wonderfully made, beautiful, with worth, with significance. And I wasn’t believing it. The enemy was tricking me and filling my head and my heart with lies that whatever that next “if only” was, things would be okay. I’d be on the right track. I would feel like I had worth. I would feel like I had significance. So again, confusion and distraction is what the enemy was using in my life. Those things, relationships, the “if only” were becoming strongholds in my life that I didn’t even know were strongholds in my life.

So very subtle is what I want you guys to hear. Sometimes it has to be something really big, like Scott has shared with us addiction or something like that. But sometimes it’s just those subtle things that just take us off track a little bit where suddenly our eyes aren’t up, are eyes are out. So that is something that has tripped me up a lot in my life. As soon as my eyes shift from looking up and the Lord is number one in my life and I start looking out, I’m allowing myself to get caught up in strongholds. So God has been working a lot in me on that for many years.

I just wanted to share with you guys if that will help shift your vision a little bit and maybe save you some of the grief and sadness and anxiety that that creates in us when our eyes are shifted on the wrong place. Not on God, but on others, on situations and on our environment. So what I’ve been working on and what God has been working on in me... Because I used to think I could battle those strongholds on my own. I would think, “Oh I made growth. That’s not an issue for me.” And then I would realize something else would come into my life and become that stronghold. It’s because I was trying to do those things in my own power and in my own strength.

We know, right, that we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us. Because it has to come in His power and in His strength. It is a battle. So what God has been working on me for many years is to discipline myself to start every morning filling my head with some scriptures that are super important to me, and that empower me and make me feel strong.

So for me, Philippians 4:13 that I just said to you guys. For me Proverbs 3:5-6 – trusting in the Lord, leaning on Him, not in my own understanding. And Matthew 6:33 – seeking God first in all things.

Every morning I start my day just saying those out loud to myself, and every morning I start my day saying, “I’m surrendering to you, Lord. This isn’t about me, this isn’t about my time, this isn’t about my day, this isn’t about my plan. It’s about yours. I want there to be less of me and more of you.” What that does for me when I do that is I feel really strong for the day. I can’t be tripped up. I can’t be distracted. I can’t be confused.

Let me say this: I’m not perfect. I haven’t gotten it right. There are very many days where I forget to do that. Something distracts me and I start the day without giving it to the Lord first. It is very obvious to me that I haven’t surrendered the day because those little temptations and

those little strongholds start to distract me and take me down a path that isn't the path the Lord has planned for me.

So what do I want you guys to get away from this? The most important thing I just want you guys to hear from all of this is that it is a battle. God has already won the battle. So give it to Him. Let Him empower you. I used to think when I was young that when I'd give up that control (like Diane talked about), that I would feel weak. But actually what happens is I feel really strong. I feel full of joy and peace and freedom. So what I want you to hear is that even things that look good, relationships and taking care of ourselves and looking like our best selves, even all those things that look really good can become strongholds if we let them take a position in front of God. If we let them take our position from up to out, even good things can become strongholds.

[Scott] Thank you, Nancy. I trust that God is speaking to you in this area. Whether it's a small thing or a large thing, it's a war, it's a battle, God wants you to experience fullness of life. Anything that's robbing you in your own heart, distractions in your own thinking that are taking away from that is a tool that can be used by the enemy. Don't let that happen.

I'm going to pray for all of us. Would you stand with me? I'm going to pray a prayer of power. Powerful prayer for each one of us in our own lives.

[PRAYER] God, teach us what it means to know you as El Shaddai, a God of power. We want to recognize in our own hearts that we are weak and we find ourselves easily distracted by the thoughts that come from these strongholds, tools of the enemy to rob us of the joy you want for us. So you are the God of power. We want to trust you. God, we ask that you would speak into our lives, that you would remove those strongholds, you'd demolish them and demolish the arguments, the faulty logic we have. We ask that you would speak strongly into our hearts and lives to dislodge those patterns of thinking that are robbing us of the grace and joy that you want in our lives. Lord, we are pleading with you. We cannot do this alone. We need you every day and we're coming now before you, asking for your Spirit to reveal that power in our hearts today. Do a deep work, Lord. We ask that you would give us the courage to do what's right. We ask that you would give us the persistence to come to your word regularly. Lord, we thank you for the power that we have in your Spirit as we come and pray before you and ask that would use that power in our lives in dramatic and powerful ways. When that happens, we will give glory to you. We will rejoice in you, we will experience your greatness, and we will all have a testimony because of what you're doing in our lives to win the battle. In Jesus' name, amen.