

Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. Thank You for all You do for us. Thank You for today, and even the fact that we can't be together. We thank You for the fact that we can still put the Word of God out and touch people's lives. We just pray, Father, for all of the good things that You're doing. And Lord, we can't wait to get back to the church and tell some folks of some great things that have happened even the last couple of weeks. People are moving here to come to our church. We love You. We just thank You, Father, for all You do for us. And we pray Your blessings upon us now. In Jesus' name, for the sake of our God. Amen.

I. The Opposition to Spiritual Growth

We have now come through our four lessons on spiritual growth. As I said, I wanted to kind of take this time while we had some time to focus. We just came out of camp, and many of the kids there that made decisions are working with Zach. Yet, in our own church, we have so many people who are growing and going through and trying to build their own relationship. So, I went back to things that helped me many, many, many years ago and just kind of reformatted them a little bit and put them into an easy, understandable format for all of us to try to help us get to where we need to be.

Those four lessons now pretty much show you how it all works. We have gone through from Ezekiel 47 right up through our walk with God, our spiritual growth. I've talked about the indwelling Holy Spirit of God when you get saved, and the infilling Holy Spirit of God on a daily basis. Last week, and in fact, the last two weeks, we talked about the leading of the Holy Spirit of God.

Today, I want to take some time and give you the other side of the story. We have talked about all the things that you need to do, but I think you need to be prepared at the same time that this is not going to be an easy thing. It really isn't. Today, I want to talk to you about the opposition that you're going to face as you try to grow for the Lord.

I've said it many, many times, and we're all familiar with it because I've taught it, that all history follows just two courses of action. God moves down through history to accomplish His plan, and then the devil moves in opposition to stop that plan. Unfortunately, that doesn't just pertain to history; that pertains to your life and my life. Once you decide you're going to grow spiritually, then you can rest assured that the devil will begin to move in opposition to that, just trying to stop that spiritual growth. That's what I want to talk about today.

II. Three Categories of Spiritual Growth

My observation over the years, with thousands of people that I've been in contact with, ministered to, or tried to help, is that when a person gets saved and begins his or her life of spiritual growth, they basically fall into one of three basic categories. I've watched this for years and years and years, and it's absolutely true. In fact, I catalog people along these lines.

1. The first kind of person is someone who, when they get saved, really doesn't have a lot of issues. They don't. They've had a good moral life. They've not gotten into a lot of things that caused them a lot of problems. They're just good lost people. Once they get saved, they begin to move forward, and they don't have a lot of opposition in their life. They're the ones that we all know, that you've all worked with them. They're the easiest ones to work with because they don't have a lot of baggage. They just seem to get saved, and they move in the right direction, and very little hinders them. That's really the best situation to find yourself in. This group has about a 99%, maybe 99.9% success rate. They don't have a lot of things that hold them up.
2. The second category would be what I would call the midline issues. These will be people that get saved, and they'll have issues in their marriage. They'll have issues with their kids. They'll have some personal issues. Nothing that can't be worked through. Nothing that can't be fixed. Usually, it just takes somebody working with them, getting them a plan of action, and they move from there. I'd say they have between an 80% and 85%, maybe even 90% success rate. Most of them are going to do what they need to do, and it's just the way it is.
3. Then the third one, the third one, is people that are going to have some really deep-seated issues. They're going to have some issues from a life of bad associations with people, or simply bad choices. Many times, those two go hand in hand. We've seen all of that dealing with people. We've seen some people who just can't make it. They can't get past it. You'll see them for two or three, four weeks, about every other year, and then they're back into it. They're good people, and they really want to try, but they're just overwhelmed. Their spiritual growth gets stopped dead in its tracks.

Many times, it's a thing where it can be emotional issues that they struggle with, that they can't get past. Many times, it'll be anxiety or depression, those things that come from a lifestyle outside the principles of the Word of God. Many times, there'll be anger issues. Many times, it'll be addiction issues. Sometimes, it'll be problems that will just completely overtake them and hold them hostage. These are called strongholds. This group, unfortunately, probably has a success rate of less than 25%. I don't see a lot of people that make this. The ones that do, they're an incredible type of individual. But most of them don't. They just have a tough time getting past these things. Unfortunately, most of them don't.

In our people ministry, and this is where we have talked about dealing with people and their problems, and you helped me, and we worked together in all of that, we talk about three levels of counseling. We kind of put it into a medical mindset format.

➤ I put the group one with no real issues as Band-Aids and Mercurochrome. Sometimes they just got little scuffs or little ouchies, but there are no real issues that you have to get into.

➤ The second group, the Midline group, we call them broken arms and appendectomies. Clearly a little more to deal with, but nothing that is major, nothing that can't be fixed, just like getting your appendix out, which I think takes

about 15 minutes now, and getting a broken arm or a broken leg set. Then you heal, and then you're back to normal.

➤ The third group, the deep-seated issues, we call those brain surgery and heart transplants. This is what you get into with this group. This is not for somebody who doesn't know what they're doing to try to work with. This is more than just discipleship.

We know that our discipleship lessons in all three cases will lead to you getting into somebody's life and helping them understand life in a better way. But the third level, they're going to have some issues, and they're going to have some struggle. This is going to be a real opposition to some people's spiritual growth. It's the number three, the brain surgery and heart transplants, that I find more and more in dealing with people. I want to help you get the victory. Certainly, my goal is for all of you to grow to the place where God wants you to be. But there are going to be strongholds in your life that are going to try to go against what you're trying to do with the Lord.

I understand totally from dealing with it, I understand why people will commit suicide and take their own lives. They get so far down on this third level. They get so overwhelmed. They get so taken advantage of by their own emotions, the circumstances that they have put themselves in, that they actually think that there is no way out. Of course, we know that's not true. We know that there's always a way out of whatever situation you want to find yourself in. It's the fact that some people get so far into the number three that they just can't see anything but their own misery, what they're going through. They actually come to the place that they think that taking their own life is really the answer to it and the only way out.

Like a guy said one time, "Well, I think I'll just kill myself and end it all." To which I responded, "Well, if you kill yourself, I understand that. But you're not going to end it all. You're just going to start it all because it's only the beginning after you die." But they don't see it that way.

I was telling somebody this week that our society in the last 20, 30 years has gotten so bad that it's reaching down even into our younger kids. I remember back in the 70s when I first came to Kansas City around 1977, I started going down to the City Union Mission. Most of the guys that were running it back then are all gone and dead now. But I remember spending time with them and talking with them. I noticed that the average age back in the 70s of the guys that were at the City Union Mission was probably 50s, 60s, and 70s, and beyond. If you go down to the Mission now, you're going to find that that average age is probably around 19, 20, 20, 25, maybe 30. It's totally changed.

I talked to a guy this week who had a question about someone in his family who's just 12 years old. He wanted to know if a 12-year-old could possibly be a lesbian. I tried to explain it to him. I said, "Here's the problem you have. I don't think any 12-year-old can totally understand the ramifications of that. But here's the downside of it. We're so bombarded today, kids in school." I told him, "The things that you and I learned that were bad things, we learned when we were in high school. But those same terrible bad things that we learned back then, they're learning now in third, fourth, fifth, sixth grade." I said, "There's a lot of confusion with kids today. And add to

that, the parents aren't helping to erase the confusion." So our kids today, our world today, you today, are under a very black cloud that wants to take away everything that is right, everything that is biblical, everything that has any value to it. Our kids and you yourself are going to be bombarded as you begin to try to spiritually grow, especially if you find yourself with some serious issues in your life, which today, because of the way the world is, because of how the influences today begin much earlier than they did just 20, 30 years ago.

The old saying that sin never leaves a man better than it finds him is certainly so true today. I know many people think that there is no way out. Of course, that's not true. I want to talk today, carrying on with what we have looked at, about the opposition today. I want to talk to you about breaking strongholds in your life. Because there's going to come a time, and some of you that are listening to this, I guarantee you, there are people there today listening to this that are faced with these issues. So maybe it will be a help to you.

III. Defining a Stronghold

Now let's define it first of all. What is a stronghold? How do we define a stronghold? Basically, a stronghold is a lifestyle that is not conducive to the principles of Christianity. This is a textbook answer here. It's due to a period of time in our life of improper thought that will produce improper actions. It goes back to that old counseling principle that we use, attitude and action. Whatever your attitude is, is what will produce your action. When your attitude is about the right things, then it produces the right action. When it's about the wrong things, that's just the way it goes.

Now the greatest example of this that I can possibly give you is found back in the book of Judges, somewhere around Judges 16, I think. It's in the life of a man by the name of Samson. Here's a guy who in his lifetime makes about every bad choice that a person can make. I've seen people like that. I've tried to help people get out of the messes they're in when I've looked at it and sat down and talked with them. The problem is they're 30, 40, 50 years old, 20 years old. And yet they've got 20 years, 30 years, 40 years of just some of the worst choices that you could ever make in your life. Those choices don't just linger around for a while and then leave. They attach themselves to other bad choices. After a while, you've got a mountain inside of you. That's hard to overcome sometimes. Not sometimes, it's hard to overcome.

You've heard me teach the lesson on Samson before, who gets into every mess that he could get into. At the end of his life, he's a picture of a Christian that represents somebody in his third stage. He never gets the victory. Yet he has all kinds of opportunities to get the victory. But the problem is he keeps doing his own thing. He just will not submit himself to what God tells him to do, and what he knows to do, it's even worse. You've heard me preach it before that at the end of his life, he winds up a spiritual suicide, physical suicide too. But he's a picture of you and me who gets so far out and so far down and gets overcome by some strongholds in our life that we just can't turn it around.

I've told you before that his three-point outline, that it's Samson's case, but it's also true in your life and my life: 1.) Sin will bind you. The Philistine, which is a picture of the world's system,

when they took him captive, that's the first thing they did. They bound him. Your sin and coming to the place of a stronghold in your life, it will bind you.2.) The next thing they did after they bound him was that they blinded him. They put his eyes out.3.) Then the third thing that they did is they put him to a gristmill that he ground out grain for the world's system or the Philistine.

You know the outline, I've preached it many, many times: Sin will bind you, it will blind you, and it will grind you. That is a stronghold when you get to the place that whatever you're doing in life binds you, and then it blinds you to the principles, and it'll certainly grind you.

Strongholds range from bad habits to being a serial killer and everything in between. It comes down to a life of bad choices. It can be alcohol, it can be drugs, it can be pornography, it can be homosexuality or lesbianism, it can be tobacco, it can be lust, it can be gambling, it can be abusive relationships. I've known many a lady that was in an abusive relationship that that thing was a stronghold in her life. She hated it, but she couldn't break out of it. So you find it in all forms. You'll find it in incest. You'll find it in child pornography or child molestation. You'll find it in just in anger. You'll find it in people who have a root of bitterness. These all become strongholds in a person's life.

Before we look at the passage that I want to look at, and by the way, you might want to turn to it, it's in 2 Samuel 5. I want to give you in the Bible the definitive verse on strongholds. The definitive verse on strongholds, and you'll want to get this down. It's in Proverbs 5:21-23.

Proverbs 5:21-23

For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.

His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.

He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Now that's a stronghold. A stronghold is something that we have in our life that the sin that we do takes hold of us, and we cannot break it. When you who are in the third level try to grow spiritually, these are the things you're going to face. Thank God there's a way around it, through it, over it, under it, and we're going to talk about that here in just a few moments.

Now let me say this. All aspects of a stronghold are not bad. I mentioned an addiction that can be drugs, or it can be alcohol, it can be many things you're going to be addicted to. But you know it's the difference between how God defines the word and the world defines the word. It's like last week with Black Lives Matter. The world looks at it one way, the Bible looks at it another way. It's the same way with the word addiction. The Bible says back there in 1 Corinthians 16:15 that there was a family of Stephanas who were addicted to the ministry. So there's a wrong addiction and there's a right addiction.

You take drunkenness. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:18 that we're not to be drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit. This gives the indication that you can either be drunk with the things of the world or you can be drunk with the things of God. There are some great parallels. I don't have time to deal with this one, but there are some great parallels laid out

in Ephesians between the world drunk and somebody that's filled with the Spirit of God and drinking. That's why they call it spirits. You go buy a liquor store and it's got the word spirits because it brings a spirit into your life. Wrong spirit, but there it is. Of course, when you get filled with the Spirit of God, drunk with the Spirit of God, then you follow the right spirit. It's just that simple.

Along with that, I want you to understand that there are two kinds of strongholds. I want this all clear before we move into this thing. There are two kinds of strongholds, and you're going to find that in our hymnal back at the church, you're going to find that there's a song that we sing, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." So our relationship with God becomes a stronghold. When we were at camp a couple of weeks, about a month ago, I talked to the kids. The theme was building a wall. I talked to them about building a wall in their life and building a tower in their life and how that was going to become God's stronghold in their life. Then you have the world's stronghold, and that'll be the things that we've mentioned already. Those will be the things that the world puts into your life too. As Proverbs 5 said, they're going to take hold of you. So there are two strongholds, there are two kinds of drunkenness, and there are two kinds of addictions. The problem is that your goal ought to be to get the right drinking out of the right bottle, ought to get the right addiction, and begin to build the right stronghold in your life.

In the book of Daniel, you're going to find that Daniel is a great picture of this because here he is, he's in Babylon, a type of the world and the world system under Nebuchadnezzar wants to make him a stronghold for them. He wants to give them all of the things that the world does and in the course of three years or so have them stand before Nebuchadnezzar, and that's what the world wants. Your stand will be your stronghold. Of course, Daniel refused to do that, and Daniel's stronghold was the things of God, and it's a tremendous study to look at. But you're either going to addict yourself to the Word of God or in the things of God, or you're going to drink the devil's cup and you're going to get filled with and addicted to the wrong things that he has for you. It's just that simple.

IV. Breaking Strongholds: Five Lessons from 2 Samuel 5

Now I want to read for you 2 Samuel 5. We're going to begin in verse 4 and we're going to go up to about verse 10. Then I'm going to come back and I'm going to give you five lessons that when you begin to grow spiritually and the opposition comes, whether in the first one, second one, or the third one, you need to know this because the devil just may throw you a curveball sometime and hit you with something that you're not prepared for.

2 Samuel 5:4-10

David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.

In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking David cannot come in hither.

Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David.

And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.

So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.

And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.

Now, I get asked that a lot so let me just explain that. This is military sarcasm. This is the Jebusites looking at David and his armies and laughing that they're all lame and blind. If you took away the lame and the blind, you wouldn't have enough men to take the city. It's sarcasm, military sarcasm. Like, "Your mama wears combat boots," something like that. It's a derogatory thing making fun of the nation of Israel and saying that they are a bunch of lame and blind people and they'll never be able to take this city. Put that note in your Bible there for you.

David returns this sarcasm, and basically the Jebusites say, "Aha, you got a bunch of blind and lame people. You couldn't take anything." And David reverts back, "Okay, us blind and lame people, let's show them what we can do. And when we get done, we'll stick it right in their face and say, 'You know what? The lame and the blind just whipped you today, and here you are.'" So it's double sarcasm.

Again, I want to talk to you about five simple lessons today that if you have a stronghold in your life, something that's keeping you from your spiritual growth that we have talked about and we've talked about it now and you know what it all entails, but now I want to talk about the opposition that you may find yourself in and here's how you get around it. Here's how you deal with it.

- 1.) Christ Must Lead the Battle
- 2.) Christ Must Reign on the Throne of Your Life
- 3.) Recognize Your New Identity in Christ
- 4.) Utilize the Word of God
- 5.) Live Within God's Principles

V. Reinforcing Your Spiritual Growth

Then I want you to see this. What a great verse, verse 9 is. The Bible says that he built round about. You know what that means? That means around the city he built a wall. Round about,

around the city. I talked to your kids about that at camp, that you need to build a wall. When we started our church years ago, some 17 years ago, one of the first things I did was talk about building a wall, putting in those nine gates. You know what he did? Once he got there and he made it, he reinforced it. Your life and my life is going to be a constant reinforcing of what we know to be true. So he builds, he builds around.

Then he says this. He not only builds around the wall, but he builds a fort. It says right there, "So David dwelt in the fort." He built a fort. He not only put a wall, he built a fort that would protect him from anything coming his way. In this case, the Jebusites, in your case or my case, the things of the world that want to take from you the spiritual growth that God has given you.

Then I want you to see the next thing. He says in verse 9, "and inward." He understood that this building process, this breaking of strongholds in our lives has to start within. It starts out with you and an attitude of understanding that you can't do it your way anymore and Jesus has to lead the battle. Then it moves into your understanding that you can't do it anymore, guiding your own life. So you have to put Him on the throne. Once you put Him on the throne, then again inside you realize who you are now in Christ Jesus. Then you go to work getting the victory up through the water system in the water gate. Once you get that, you reinforce it the rest of your life by making the Word of God, this church, the things of God, where God has put you. You make that your home. So he talks about a wall. He talks about a fort. He talks about inward.

Then he says this. And David, verse 10, "and David went on and grew great." That's what God wants for you. He just doesn't want you to grow. He wants you to grow great. But you have to put these five things in your life. You have to realize that Christianity is not a program. It isn't something that you do one Sunday a month, a couple of times a year, once every two or three years. Christianity and all the things that God has for you has to be a lifestyle. It has to be a complete change of your thinking, of your attitude, and of your actions. You have to realize that in this battle of life, I can't win it by myself, nor can you. Jesus has to lead the way. The only way He can lead it is if you put Him on the throne of your life and then you recognize positionally where you are in Christ Jesus, and then you get in that book. Once you get there, you reinforce it with a fort and a wall from inside out.

"And David went on and grew great." Growth in spite of the Jebusites. Growth in your life in spite of the opposition. Last week I talked about the leading of the Holy Spirit of God in your life out of Acts 8. I don't know if you've thought about this yet, but when you look down here in verse 10, it says, "And David went on and grew great: and the LORD God of hosts was with him." Remember last week, the last thing we read about Philip in the New Testament? It says that Philip moved on too. Once he met that Ethiopian eunuch, his job wasn't done. God took him on preaching all the way to Caesarea and beyond. In both cases here, when you get the victory, your job's not done. Your job's just now beginning. "And David went on and it grew great."

My prayer for you, what I want to do for you, what my people want to do for you, no matter what level you find yourself in, I want to help you to grow great. I want you to move on and go on and do what God wants you to do. I want God, just like with Philip, I want God to be with you. I want God to lead you. Wherever you're at, if you will just begin, and I'll help you, I'll put

people with you to help you. We've got a number of people right now that are going through this very same thing. I'm telling you right now, it's the only way if you're going to begin to grow, if you're going to begin to grow, you're going to have to come to the place in your life where you allow God to put these five things in your world. Then you have to maintain from that point on.

My prayer for you is that you will see this today and understand this today. Next Sunday, we'll have another, and we'll kind of put an end to this series. We'll be back together, but we'll go from there.

VI. Church Announcements and Prayer

Now, listen to me very carefully before I pray here. Thursday night, I'm going to give you some basic instructions. Everybody, one thing, so you need to know if you don't have one already, we'll have some there. But from this point on, everybody's going to have to wear a face mask, and we'll instruct you on that when we get there. I say everybody except Bob Greg. Bob Greg, do not go buy a face mask because I have one that I found just for you. So I will have that for you, and you will be the only one that has one other than myself. So you don't have to go out and buy one, I'll have one there for you. Anyway, that's a thing. You're going to like it.

Anyway, it's a thing where we're going to, I'm going to Thursday night, give you some more instructions. But I really encourage you to be there Sunday, because after we're done, I want to show you and bring you, I want to give you direction, show you have an understanding. I don't want to take the time out of the service. It won't take us long afterwards. I just want to give you some instructions and bring you up to speed on some things of where we're going from here. So everybody's on the same page. We're going to change some things. I even kind of use the word radically here, just because of the times that we're in. I want to talk to you more about that, because it's very obvious now that what again is going to be coming our way. So we need to be prepared for that. But you know, we'll get through it. So I encourage you to be on Thursday night, listen very carefully. We're going back next Sunday. We'll have church, we'll have it all set up for you. Then I will give you the instructions at the end, and where we're going from here. We'll try to help you every way that we can and give you any information you have any questions, concerns, whatever the case, call me. I will give you whatever help I can of helping you understand whatever it is that you're trying to grab hold of. So let me help you with that.

Thank you for this morning being on. Again, pray for John Christensen, and pray for Dad Bradford Earl, that we can just hold them up in prayer. I know I talked to John, as I told you Thursday night this week, and he's doing better, but he's still having some issues. Earl's been locked up now for four or five months. We just need to pray for them, and love them very much. So you pray for them, continue to hold them up in your prayers, pray for each other, help each other, stay in contact with each other. Hopefully, next week, by the grace of God, we'll all get back together. We can begin to function as normal as we can in a situation, and there's no longer normal, whatever that means. So let's have a word of prayer. Then we'll be dismissed.

Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, we love You. Thank You for today. Thank You for the folks that have tuned in. Pray Your blessings upon all that we endeavor to do

for You. We love You. Give us a good week. Thank You for the folks that are getting well and back to work. We pray for those that may be still lingering with some issues, Lord, that they get through it this week. We look forward to next week, being back together as a church family. We love You. Thank You for today. Thank You for the message. May it find its way into the hearts of Your people who want to grow and be everything that You want them to be. In Jesus' name, for a shaky way, Aska. Amen.