



Strongholds – December 4, 2019  
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**Verses Covered This Week**

*Romans 12:2*

*Genesis 3:1 – 6*

*John 15:26, 16:7 – 11*

*Romans 8:13*

*Galatians 5:16, 19 – 23*

*Matthew 6:25, 31 – 34*

*1 Corinthians 10:13*

*Psalms 139*

Let's pray together and we'll jump in our lesson tonight.

Heavenly Father, again, we just thank You for who You are. I thank You for the word that You've given to us so that we can read Your word and to know You and that You make Yourself known to us through the Scriptures and through the Holy Spirit within us. Father we thank You so much for that. So, Father, we thank You so much for that. So, Father, I just pray that You will guide our thoughts tonight, that You'll help us to apply this lesson where we need to apply it, and that, Father, You will just speak and we'll hear Your voice. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

So tonight I want to talk about a topic that is not in the normal discipleship material. Of course, I didn't last time with worry and concern. But if I asked you about strongholds, do you know what strongholds are? OK. These are not your strongholds, but I'm just asking in general, what are some strongholds that women struggle with? Control, fear, abandonment issues, comparison, insecurity, fomo. We were doing an interview for the missions person and this person being interviewed said, "My biggest struggle is fomo." And so I waited until we got out because I wasn't going to look like I didn't know. And I go, "Is that some kind of drug or what?" It was explained to me what it meant. So a year ago I didn't have any clue what that meant. So I did learn that. FOMO: Fear of missing out.

Tonight I want to talk about strongholds, what do we do about the strongholds in our life, is there a biblical way to deal with them. If you want to turn to Romans 12, that's where we're going to start. I'm going to be like Chris tonight. We're going to be in Genesis to Revelation tonight. We're going to be all over the place. This is one of my favorite stories. This is my favorite story

of trying to find things. John made the mistake of going with me to Honduras on a mission trip. I did not realize John had never preached before. And so we walk into a church down there, and when you want into a church down there and you're from here, the first question they ask us is, "Who's preaching?" It's not, "Will you preach?" It's "Who's preaching Sunday morning? Who's preaching Sunday night?" So having been down there multiple times, I said, "Well, I'll take Sunday morning and John will take Sunday night." And they said, "Ok. Great." And John looked at me and I said, "Yeah, you're doing Sunday night." And he said, "OK." Well, you're preaching through an interpreter, a guy who's never preached before. And if all that wasn't bad enough, Karla and I are sitting on the front row right in the middle. So there's the podium; we're sitting right here. If y'all have been around long enough you will remember about five years ago I preached through the book of Nehemiah. And so John's in the middle of his sermon and he's, his poor Aggie ring is doing this on this wooden podium as he's waiting for the interpreter to say everything he said. And he says, "Now turn to the book of Nehemiah." And I'm sitting there in the very front and I'm going through the minor prophets this way. And I'm going back through the minor prophets this way. And I'm going back this way. Well Karla, my wife, realizes I can't find Nehemiah and I've just preached through the whole book of Nehemiah. So she starts laughing which gets me laughing. And now poor John thinks he's done something wrong. And now the ring's really going. And he's so scared. He gets through and he goes, "What did I do so bad?" And I go, "What are you talking about?" He goes, "Y'all were laughing at me." And I said, "No, I couldn't find the book of Nehemiah." He goes, "Don't lie to me. You just preached through the book. I know you know where the book of Nehemiah is." And I said, "Well, John, I wish I was lying. But it took me five minutes to remember where the book of Nehemiah was." And my poor wife and I were laughing so hard we couldn't control ourselves. So if you can't find the place tonight, I will emphasize with you because I understand that sometimes the books of the Bible move on us and they're not where they're supposed to be.

My education background, my first education, I've had two educations. I have high school and went to college and I have a Bachelors and Master's degree in counseling. And so then I did not do any counseling for 30 years, I guess, and then God said, "Go to seminary." And so I have a second degree in seminary. And if you ever wondered about education, education with computers is way easier than education without computers. I had it both ways. And it's easier doing it the second way. So I still, counseling is still a major interest of mine. I still do counseling as a pastor up here. I do pastoral counseling. And so Karla and I still go to, my wife Karla and I still go to a lot of the American Association of Christian Counseling conferences. And I was amazed as I began to go to some of the different sessions about the latest research that shows that our brain is constantly changing. And it's constantly changing chemically and constantly changing in structure. And all that's based upon what we're doing and what we're thinking about. In fact, Karla sent me an article yesterday that says, if you will stop in the morning and write down, there's some new research that's coming up, if you'll stop in the morning and write down three things you're thankful for every morning, in this study they did, after some months, they began to see change in the structure of the brain again. And those people ended up being happier people and less stress in their lives. Just doing those things. So this is an area of interest of mine. Then I wondered what Scripture said about it which kind of led to me doing the research that led to today's lesson.

So Romans chapter 12, verse 2 says:

<sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

So the Scripture tells us that we are to renew our mind. And that means I believe we have the ability to literally change the structure of our mind based upon what I believe is true and what I actually do in my life. So I'm going to kind of walk you through Scripture why I think that's true. And in the end I'm going to say, here's a way we can start our mornings that will help us to find victory over strongholds; whatever that stronghold is. So this is the part that may be a little bit of a repeat, but the rest of it will not be. Genesis 3. And I know Chris talked about this so we're going to walk through this quickly. When he was talking about the two natures. I believe this is part of the two natures, this part of it. So we're going to walk through this quickly. But it's kind of the foundation you have to start with.

<sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

And, again, if you'll remember, Chris said, there's this tree sitting here. If I believe this tree is going to kill me, I'm going to stay away from this tree. How many of you have scorpions in your house? I've lived in my house now 20 years. We never had scorpions any other place we've lived in College Station. And, in fact, my office that I had my business in is on the same land and we never had scorpions in it, but we have them in our house. So for 19 years I have lived in fear of scorpions. Everybody in my family's been stung but me. And so, I just said, "It's because y'all aren't careful like me." I literally get up every morning and I shake my shoes. I go through everything I can go through to make sure I never get stung by a scorpion. I believe from watching my family that if a scorpion stung me, it was going to be the end of life. Because, let's just say, I don't do pain well. And, thankfully, Karla's not in here saying, amen, in the back because she would say, amen, in the back. She said all along, "We would never have had four children if I had to have to first one." So I've had this huge fear, and that's controlled me. I mean, I literally every single morning shake my shoes out. My second oldest son used to think it was funny to kill scorpions and stick them in my shoes just to see what I would do when it fell out of my shoe in the morning. He's put them in my medicine cabinet. He's done all kinds of things. But it controlled my behavior. Now this year, I've been stung three times. I made it 19 years; never been stung. Stung three times. And the first time, the worst place, where's the worst place you can get stung by a scorpion? In bed. I was in bed and had my hand hanging out and it hit me and I knew exactly what it was when it happened. And so, I thought, "That wasn't that bad." And I've lived in fear, I mean fear-fear, all my life. But it controlled my behavior. It really did. It controlled my behavior because that's what I believed about it. So my belief totally controlled what I did. If I believed this tree's going to kill me, I'm going to avoid that tree. And so, I would have avoided the tree. The problem happens when satan comes in and changes what they believe. Verse 2.

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; <sup>3</sup>but from the fruit of the tree which in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" <sup>4</sup>The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! <sup>5</sup>For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

I believe for the first time because I believe up until this point, her belief said, this tree will kill you. So I'm not even going to look at it and think about it being good.

<sup>6</sup>when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

So what change her actions? Her beliefs changed her actions didn't it? As long as she believed that tree was going to kill her, she stayed away from it. As soon as she chose to believe satan over God, then the tree became desirable to her. And I 100% believe that our thoughts control our actions. In fact, I believe our thoughts control our actions and our actions control our emotions. And so unfortunately most of psychology says, if I can change your actions, I can help you. I don't believe that's true. I believe we have to change the thoughts. And that's where I think renewing the mind, and 40 years ago when I wrote my personal theory of counseling, that's what I went to and God has continually since that, I wrote it just because I believed it. Now I can prove it scripturally why I believe it. That we've got to change our thinking if we're going to change our actions and our emotions. And it all goes back to changing what I believe and what I truly believe. And then my beliefs will control me. So that's our starting point. So let's jump from there to John 15. We'll start in verse 26. The good thing tonight is I don't have any minor prophets and I don't have Nehemiah we have to find. John 15:26. We're going to read, if you're writing notes, we're going to read 15:26, then we're going to read 16:7 – 11. But 15:26 says:

<sup>26</sup>“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me,

Of course, we're talking about the Holy Spirit here. Now jump over to chapter 16, verse 7.

<sup>7</sup>But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. <sup>8</sup>And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; <sup>9</sup>concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup>and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; <sup>11</sup>and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

And so, the Holy Spirit is our source of truth and I know y'all covered that in lesson one or two, right. The Holy Spirit's our source of truth. So if what I think is so important, I have to be tuned into the Holy Spirit. And I've got to make sure the Holy Spirit is telling me truth. And so as I read God's word, and this is a simple thing I, if you teach from me and you've been to where I've taught, how do you teach Scripture? One of the first things I'll tell you is, when you open your Bible to prepare your lesson, are you praying first for the Holy Spirit to show you the truth that's in the lesson? I do not believe I can understand this Scripture apart from the Holy Spirit. And so, I believe it's important that we realize that every single time. And I'm a male and I'm a little hard headed so I can't tell you how many times I've spent two days trying to prepare a sermon and I'm just struggling. You know, this doesn't make any sense, I think I know what I'm supposed to do. I don't understand. And God says, “Have you asked the Holy Spirit to help you to understand?” And, of course, I say, “No, I kind of skipped that point.” I cannot tell you how many times I've

done that. I believe it's that critical. If you are not asking the Holy Spirit to help you to understand truth, you're not going to understand truth. And he says here, obviously the sin, but he says beyond that, righteousness, He'll help me know what's right. And judgment, and he talks about in the judgment, because the ruler of the world has been judged, He'll let me know whose really in control. Because, let's be honest, how many times do we still struggle? If I ask you the question, "Is God in control?" How many of you will raise your hand yes? OK. Then why do we struggle sometimes believing God's in control? And if any of you worry in here, and I'm a worrier, you don't believe God's in control or you wouldn't be worrying. So why do we struggle so much believing God's in control? Because we're not listening to the Holy Spirit on a continual basis allowing Him to show us who's really in control. It's not us. It's not satan. God's really in control. Am I going to trust Him to do that?

OK. So Romans 8:13. It says,

<sup>13</sup>for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

I believe, I truly believe if I wake up in the morning and I think, "I'm not going to be angry today. I'm just not going to be angry today. I'm not going to be angry today." Before I can get one mile down Elmo Weedon I'm yelling at something. Because what's my focus on? It's not on the Spirit. My focus is on anger. I'm not going to do this today. I think Scripture clearly says my focus has to be on the Holy Spirit. When I get up in the morning, "Holy Spirit where are you leading me today? What are we going to do today? What truth are You going to share with me today?" So I read my Bible that morning. What are You saying to me? What are you telling me this morning? If my focus is on the Spirit, this says I will live out the deeds of the Spirit. But if it's on the flesh, I'm going to live out the deeds of the flesh. And every time I get up in the morning worried about my strongholds or focused on whatever my stronghold is, that's what's going to find victory because it's where my focus is. I've got to get to the point that I can get past that and focus on the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 says this in a little different way.

<sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

And then it goes:

<sup>19</sup>Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

So when I'm focused on the Spirit, what am I going to experience? The fruit of the Spirit. What's going to come through? I'm going to have the very things, almost everything y'all mentioned when I talked about strongholds can be seen in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It covers almost everything we talked about. So am I

going to let the Holy Spirit lead me? Am I going to focus on that? Am I going to focus on the flesh? Because when we focus on the flesh, verse 19, the deeds of the flesh, and again, the first list is easy: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery. But then we keep going: enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, and factions, enmity, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. When I'm looking at the flesh, that's where the flesh takes me. And so when I'm struggling with anger and if I'm struggling with jealousy and I'm struggling with disputes or factions, where do I know my focus is? On the flesh; not on the Spirit. Because if I focus on the Spirit, I'll have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When it's on the flesh I will struggle with these things over here. Our strongholds are almost always in one of these areas. They go back to one of these areas that we're talking about in the flesh.

So what do we do with all that? I believe, again, kind of going back to my counseling background, I believe that in general, a woman's biggest need is security. And by security I mean she wants to be loved, protected, and know everything's going to be OK. A man's greatest need is significance. He needs to know that I'm making a difference in the world and I'm important. OK. Have y'all covered marriage, the Ephesians 5 passage yet? Well, if you look at it, what's a woman commanded to do, a wife commanded to do with the husband? Respect him and submit to his leadership. If she respects me and submits to my leadership, am I going to feel significant? What's the man commanded to do? Love her, lead her, protect her; security. You realize that when I asked you what your stronghold were, most of the ones y'all said go back to some kind of security. Some kind of, "I feel insecure, comparing, do I measure up, am I mothering right?" In general, women struggle with security. And so just as an example, I'm going to go with security and self-esteem as our example to see how we walk through this.

Let's jump over to Matthew 6. Those few of you that are in my life group, I know we've lived in Matthew for a year now, but I want to look at a couple of verses here. Verse 25 says:

<sup>25</sup>“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

And then He says again in verse 31 through 34:

<sup>31</sup>Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup>But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup>“So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

I think that's the understatement of all of Scripture. Each day has enough trouble of its own. As wives and mothers, what do y'all worry about that's in this list? Worry about what your kids are going to wear? Worry about food on the table? I love the meme that was on Facebook the other day. I didn't know that the biggest struggle of being a wife and a mother was deciding what we're going to eat every night. I tell men this, they don't listen, so don't get your hopes up about what I'm about to say. I tell men this all the time. If you want to lead well in your house, ask your wife to tell you when she wants you to decide what you're eating tonight. Because she probably really

is tired of having to make that decision every single day and the guys look at me and they go, “I don’t think you know my wife.” I’m going, “Go ask her.” None of them have ever come back to me that they’ve asked any of you if your men are in anything that I teach. Have they ever asked you that question? Yeah, I didn’t think so. And then y’all have the whole worries about, and I don’t understand this, that the day of the calendar determines what you can wear. I don’t understand that. I don’t understand why I can’t wear white after Labor Day. It does make sense to me why in Wyoming or Montana you wear felt cowboy hats on a certain day. Because it’s cold outside and you wear straw hats starting on a certain day because it’s hot. That makes sense to me. But the color of clothing doesn’t make sense to me. I’ll say, “Karla I love this dress why don’t you wear it?” And she goes, “Do you know what month it is? And I’m going, “I don’t care what month it is.” My clothes in my closet are not divided by the calendar. I mean I do have short sleeve and long sleeve shirts, but that’s about the only difference in there. But I realize that all those things are important. It’s when they become too important. And it’s when they begin to drag you down. It’s when, I remember when Karla and I came back from Canada, we’d been doing mission work up there, we were up there for about 6 months. And because we’re young people full of wisdom, we decided to get pregnant while we’re in Canada and I have no job to come home to. Because that makes perfect sense when you’re 22. If any of my kids had done that I’d have killed them. So I remember we came home and basically Karla owned one dress so she wore the same dress every Sunday to church. And her mother said, “I’m going to buy you more dresses. I’m embarrassed that you wear the same dress to church every Sunday.” And Karla said, “Aren’t you just excited I’m in church every Sunday?” And I loved her mom. Her mom unfortunately is no longer with us. I loved her mom. But her mom was hung up on that. I mean that’s just a major deal that Karla had to wear the same dress every Sunday. And I’m just saying we’ve got to get all this in balance. I know it’s important. But I didn’t like phonics because there were always exceptions and I don’t like rules with clothing because I was told for 15 years you can’t wear black and blue together and now everybody’s wearing black and blue together. So y’all change the rules and I don’t like change. But I’m trying to joke about this some, but how many hours do y’all spend worried about the things we just listed here? What am I going to wear? Are the clothes clean? What are we going to eat tonight? Can we pay our bills this week? And that consumes how much of your time and how much of your energy? Therefore, programming your brain to worry about the things that the Scripture says, seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be done. Now, again, I know that does not mean I can just read my Bible all day and I don’t have to work and everything, the laundry will be done. I know that’s not what it means. But I’m saying there is a proper focus there. If I was teaching a group of guys I’d be saying, “Y’all get caught up in significance. You feel significant at work so you want to become work-a-holics because it makes you feel significant.” That’s just as much sin, if I was talking to the men, that’s what I would be talking about. But I find with ladies, it’s more of these kinds of issues that really addressed here in Matthew 6. Do I believe it’s true or not? I mean we’re really back to, is Scripture true or is it not? Is that tree going to kill me or did God tell me that because He didn’t want me to hang out around the tree? Are these things really important and should be controlling my life or is there a balance here if I will seek first the kingdom, all these things will work out? What’s true? What am I willing to do?

So here’s kind of what I’ve talked to the men already this year and what I want to share this evening. And then I’m going to walk through how I did this in my own life. So wake up in the morning, and I literally think through what I’m about to say to y’all. Because I’m a literal, step-by-step kind of person. Wake up in the morning and say, “I’m a believer. I do not have to struggle

with whatever my stronghold is.” An example I’m going to give is my biggest struggle is self-esteem. I was never the athlete. I didn’t like the way God made me because my favorite sport is basketball. And all 5’6” guys excel in basketball. And so I’ve always struggled with self-esteem. Then I struggled because for whatever reason, I think it’s the time period, my dad thought that it would make me weak if he ever encouraged me or told me he was proud of me. And so it’s always been a struggle of mine. And so I wake up in the morning and literally say, “God, I’m a believer. I don’t have to struggle with self-esteem because I can believe what You say.” So I start my day that way. Second thing. Believe that the Holy Spirit in you has the ability to move and change and alter your desires and beliefs. Not when we focus on the desires and the beliefs, but when I focus on the Holy Spirit. The next one; you’re going to believe that when the Holy Spirit does that, you cannot step into the desires of the flesh. Isn’t that what we read in Galatians? That if I’m focused on the Spirit, if I walk in the Spirit, I will not desire the flesh. So if my focus is on the Holy Spirit, listening to Him, and so therefore, I do not have to sin because the Holy Spirit has enabled me to do what is right. If I live in Him, I cannot fail. And I’m talking that step here of I believe our strongholds are our way of calling them something instead of sin. And I believe every one of our strongholds at the very base is sin. And we may call them all different kinds of things, you know, insecurity to eating disorders to whatever, but I think our strongholds in our lives and I know mine of insecurity, went back to sin in my life.

1 Corinthians 10:13. One of my favorite verses because it helps me know where I stand with God. It says:

<sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Do I believe that? Do I really believe that no temptation has overtaken me but such is common to man and God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to handle, but with temptation will provide the way of escape? Now we know the way of escape, we’re going to find the way of escape by listening to the Holy Spirit. If I’m listening to anything else, I’m not going to find this way of escape. I’m going to fall deeper into the temptation. I’m going to fall into the temptation. So with that knowledge, I know that if my focus is right, that God will keep me going the direction I need to be going. But it’s only by me listening to Him and letting Him guide my steps each day.

So put all this into practice. Jump over to Psalm 139. At a very dark time in my life, I was struggling that I felt rejected by my dad. We were empty nesters and Karla and I were trying to figure out what that looked like now that we didn’t have four kids that we homeschooled in our home 24/7 and a business that was in our home 24/7. Trying to reinvent what life looked like and just all this confusion going on. And I didn’t know how to handle it. I’ll be honest, I didn’t know how to handle it. And so God said, God challenged me to read Psalm 139 every morning and I read it every morning for two months until it sank in. Because I’m, again, hard-headed. Y’all probably don’t need to read it for two months, but I’m a little hard-headed and I don’t learn easy sometimes. But we’re not going to read the whole Psalm, but I want to start with verse 1.



<sup>1</sup>O Lord, You have searched me and known me. <sup>2</sup>You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. <sup>3</sup>You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

How many of you ever told God, “God if you really knew who I was, You wouldn’t like me.” How many of y’all have ever done that? Or you thought about, if other people really knew who I was, they wouldn’t like who I am. What does this verse say? How well does God know you? Intimately knows us. Does He know your thoughts? Yes. Even when I don’t feel He’s near? He says, “I know your thoughts from afar. You may feel like I’m far off, I still know your thoughts.” OK. So God knows us. He knows what we’re thinking. He knows what our struggles are. Does He love us anyway? Verse 13.

<sup>13</sup>For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. <sup>14</sup>I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works,

How many of you really believe you are fearfully and wonderfully made? I didn’t for years. God, You made a mistake. I’m supposed to be 6’ tall because I’m supposed to play basketball. I still don’t understand this. I’m not passing judgement. Just don’t understand. My wife, at one point, has curly hair and uses a straightener. And my daughter has straight hair and got perms. I’m sorry. That doesn’t compute in my brain. Though I did joke a long time ago that I said, “I think I’ll get a perm. I’ve always wanted a perm in my hair.” And my wife would just laugh at me. But why are we dissatisfied about the way we look? Why do we struggle with that? Didn’t God make us the way we’re supposed to be? How many of y’all in here get irritated at the people who eat ice cream every day and still are thin as can be and you look at ice cream and gain 5 pounds? So did God make us wrong? Did God make our metabolism wrong? I could go on and on, but don’t we struggle with that? And this is men and women both. We struggle. Doesn’t it say that God made me? Wove me together. I’m fearfully and wonderfully made and wonderful are Your works. Am I supposed to be what I am? Am I OK with that? Do I believe that truth? Because if that becomes an issue and I know it does. We pick on women with this issue, but it’s not much of an issue with men of always comparing ourselves to other people. That’s not fair. Who would you say was the greatest evangelist of our time? Billy Graham. What was Billy Graham’s life like? Lot of travel. Got to preach to thousands and thousands of people all over the world. Who is the greatest evangelist of the 1<sup>st</sup> century? Paul. What did Paul’s life look like? How many times was Billy Graham in prison, not because he was there to speak, but was a prisoner in prison? How many times was he in prison? How many times was he shipwrecked? How many times was he bitten by a poisonous snake? How many times was he beaten and thrown out of the city? How many times was he stoned? Doesn’t Paul, then, have a complaint? “God, this isn’t fair. You’ve got Billy Graham over here and his life was easy. You’ve got me over here, I’m shipwrecked, I’m beaten, skin’s put on me, dogs have chased me, all these things. I’ve spent more time in prison than out of prison.” I just read the book of Acts. How many times do the leaders say, “He’s not guilty. But we’re not going to let him go because we don’t want to disturb the Jews.” So he’s in prison, not because of something he’s done, but willingly by secular leadership says he’s not supposed to be in there. Doesn’t he have a complaint? What does he tell us? I’m satisfied when I have a lot. I’m satisfied with nothing. My God’s strength be shown in my weakness. He had whatever the physical ailment was that he had. So when we look at these two examples, it makes our complaints pretty weak. So why do we complain? Because I don’t believe that book. If I believe this book, then I’m where God wants me to be. I still have no clue why at 21 God called

me in the ministry, and at 51 I went into full time ministry for the first time. I don't understand that. I believe I was in God's will all the way through that though. I believe God clearly said, "Go to Canada for six months. Come back here and don't go to seminary right now. I've got other plans for you." I don't understand that but it's what He asked me to do. Have I complained about it through the years? Of course I did. Especially trying to go back to school at 50 to seminary and trying to learn. Are we OK? Do I believe this book? Right now, about 18 months ago, I had three stints put in my heart. I have another blockage in the widow maker that's 50%. From the research I've done, the only way to get that blockage to go away is to go on a plant-based diet. Being a male in Bryan/College Station and going on a plant based diet, I literally cannot tell you how many times I had friends say, "Yes, I'll go to Salata with you to eat lunch, but don't tell anybody we went here." I struggled with that. Because to me that's saying, you're not a real man because you eat salads. I struggle with that. But I know God said, "My call on your life, Randy, is to stay in full-time ministry until you're 70 and you're not going to make it if you don't change what you're doing." So do I choose to be obedient to what God told me to do? And get made fun of by my friends? It happens. Do I walk around saying how terrible my friends are for making fun of me? No, because 19 months ago I would have been doing the same thing. You know, I'd been making fun of any guy that told me, as a matter of fact, I remember when Chris had his heart attack and he told us he was going vegan and we all laughed at him. I would have done the same thing. So can I find peace that I'm doing what God wants me to do even if my closest friends make fun of me? Go home and tell my mom who just had a heart attack not too long ago, I said, "Mom, if you go on this plant based diet." She said, "I asked my cardiologist and he said, 'You're crazy.' Life's not worth living if you can't eat meat." I'm going, "Well, you know what, God told me clearly this is what I'm supposed to do." Do I trust God or do I not? And I'm just giving you my example because I think you can put anything in this box that we're talking about here. Whatever your stronghold is. I didn't know how to teach this lesson without just walking you through my stronghold. And so, I read these verses. And then I'd get to verse 17.

<sup>17</sup>How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! <sup>18</sup>If I should count them; they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

But God, I just want my dad to tell me he's proud of me. Randy, he may never do that. But God, that's not fair. I want him to tell me he's proud of me. Three of the last five days of my dad's life, I was his caretaker. And my dad couldn't sleep and he was dying of brain cancer and couldn't sleep. So we'd sit up all night talking. And I thought, "OK, God, this is the time he's finally going to say, 'I'm proud of you, son.'" I can tell you about his childhood now. The bulldozers that he drove and what he did in the military. But he never said those words to me. And I left there on Friday afternoon saying, "God, I just want to hear those words." And then got the phone call Sunday that my dad had died. So I'll never hear them. Do I live the rest of my life depressed? I know it's kind of a depressing story to hear. Or do I go back to these verses which is what I did that day and say, "My heavenly daddy says, 'How precious are My thoughts of you, Randy. How vast is the sum of them. If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I'm still there with you.'" Which is more important? And I promise you, whatever your stronghold is, there's no way I can cover them. The only way to get over your stronghold is renewing your mind. Am I going to believe what this book says? Am I going to take the time to find out whatever your struggle is what this book says? Because I think that's the key to us finding victory over strongholds. It's coming back and finding the truth. I think it's probably best if you struggle through, find the truth for yourself. But if you need help, there's people that will help you. For

me, the struggle to find Psalm 139, obviously when I said it, many of y'all that's one of your favorite verses. I don't remember reading it much until it jumped off the page because I was seeking it saying, who am I, who am I in this world, why am I here, my kids are all gone which had been my total purpose. Having three sons, my total focus of helping raise them. Who am I now? And this page jump up at me. I'm telling you, that page is in there no matter what age you are, no matter where you are, no matter what's going on in your life, no matter what your strongholds are. And I think the key to finding victory over our strongholds is finding those passages. Memorize them. I can't quote this from memory, but I've read Psalm 139 so many times that I know what it says. I know when I'm feeling those doubts that God clearly says, "Wait a minute, I'm your heavenly Daddy. My thoughts of you are more than the sand on the seashore." "But God, I'm messing up. I feel like I'm messing up." OK. The last two verses.

<sup>23</sup>Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; <sup>24</sup>And see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

There's going to be times people attack you. And sometimes it's going to be justified. And there's times I lay in bed at night and I pray these verses. God show me my heart. I don't feel I've done anything wrong. Show me my heart because if there is an anxious thought in me, if there's something or a hurtful way in me, I want to see that so I can correct it. And I'm probably about 50/50 with those. 50% of the time God says, "Yeah, you've ignored what you've done and you've hurt somebody. And here's the hurtful way." And there's other times God has said, "No, you're being obedient. Don't listen to that. Listen to My voice that I'm talking to you." Because even when you do things right, there's going to be people in your life telling you you're doing them wrong. And unfortunately, sometimes that's going to come from inside the truth. And not because people are purposefully trying to hurt you. Sometimes they're just not thinking when they say things. Like these I'm complaining about that are making fun of me for eating salads all the time. They're not wanting to hurt me. They don't realize by the 15<sup>th</sup> time you hear that, that it hurts. And so people are going to hurt us. That's part of life. But is my God big enough to overcome the hurts? And is He loud enough when I'm listening to Him to overcome no matter what people are saying to me? Because that's the key. Renew my mind. I renew my mind by focusing on Him. I renew my mind by finding the truth. If you come into me for counseling, I'm going to ask you eventually, "What's the lie you believe?" If you're struggling with something, there's some lie you believe that's leading you to that. What's the lie you believe that satan's convinced you of? Because he's crafty. He talked Adam and Even out of perfection. He can get us to believe lies. Let's find the lie you're believing and let's find Scriptural truth that balances against that lie and let's focus on the truth of what Scripture says.