

Week 3 – Freedom

January 17, 2021

Group Discussion Guide



(~90 minutes needed)

Begin with 5 minutes of silence + prayer (7-10 minutes)

As you begin this week talking about following Jesus, start out with five minutes of prayerful silence.

[Why silence? Our world is so busy, distracted, and bee-like, with technology filling in any gaps in between. With all that moving, it can be hard to hear others and hear the voice of God. As we gather together, let's press pause and enter into a moment of quiet so that we can hear what God is saying to us and through others.]

Once you're finished with a few moments of quiet centering, have a specified person in the group pray this prayer from Thomas Merton; be sure to also pray for your group time together.

My Lord God, we have no idea where we're going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we're following Your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And we hope that we have that desire in all that we are doing. We hope that we'll never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that if we do this, You will lead us by the right road, though we may know nothing about it. Therefore, we will trust You always, even though we may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. We will not fear, for You are always with us, and You will never leave us to face our perils alone. Amen.

Read this overview (1 minute)

We know everyone here is at a different place in their faith and growth looks very different on a case-by-case basis. What does it look like, though, to grow from wherever we are now to continually making disciples? What's Next will help us to unpack and highlight possible next steps.

This week, we're looking at strongholds.

The defining mark of a stronghold is its recurring pattern in our lives. It is a sin that literally has a "strong hold" on us and breaking free on our own is difficult. While we've been victorious in Christ to demolish strongholds, it takes confession in community, prayer and accountability, and the intervention of a good God to set us free sometimes.

Like the man at the Sheep Gate pool in John 5, Jesus asks us, "Do you want to get well?" Our participation in our own healing matters and today we'll have the opportunity to dig into that together.

Scripture—Read together and discuss to prepare for breaking into small groups for strongholds discussion (25 minutes)

- Pastor and Author Pedro Okoro wrote: "Spiritual warfare is very real. There is a furious, fierce, and ferocious battle raging in the realm of the spirit between the forces of God and the forces of evil. Warfare happens every day, all the time. Whether you believe it or not, you are in a battlefield. You are at war." Do you live with an awareness of spiritual warfare? Why or why not? How would your life change if you remembered this?
- Read John 5:1-6, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, and Hebrews 12:1-2. What would be your response to the question, "Do you want to get well?" if Jesus were to ask you that today in regards to your stronghold? What do these other Scriptures stir in you as you think about the freedom you desire?
- In his sermon, Tom mentioned how someone asked him the question: do you want to act better or do you want to be better?" How would you respond to this question?
- What are some "lies" you've believed about yourself because of sin? Other examples of spiritual warfare?
- What thoughts do you have about Satan and his kingdom of this world? What comforts do you find knowing Jesus is victorious now and in the end?
- Where do you recognize spiritual battles in your life? Where do you feel prepared with the armor of God? Where do you not?
- Where is the love of the world creeping into your life? Where is it creating weaknesses? What is a constant battleground? What unhealthy habit or unhealthy thought pattern has a stronghold on you? What might be at its root?

Sharing of Strongholds—transition to smaller, same-gendered groups to share strongholds. Choose the size of group to share based on your time. If you have limited time, consider breaking the same-gendered groups into triads to share. It's of greater importance that everyone has a chance to share. (40-70 min, depending on group makeup).

Reminder: We approach spiritual warfare from a position of authority (John 16:33, James 4:7-8, Ephesians 6:12). We have the privilege of sharing these with one another. Satan longs for isolation, but God invites us into community to be seen, known, and carried in prayer.

Remember that confidentiality in the group applies to this conversation. What is shared here, stays here.

- Give each person in the group the opportunity to share strongholds in their life, to renounce and repent of sin and stronghold patterns that have developed. Take time to pray over each person as they share.
- As you share, consider these questions:
 - If Jesus asked you “Do you want to get well?”, how would you respond?
 - What would it look like for you to “get well?” Who can you share your struggle with? What would a plan to freedom look like moving forward? What can you do today that will help you break free? What step might God be inviting you to take?

Finish with reading the truth about your identity in Christ and prayer (15 minutes).

Read through each of these statements. Have each member of the group read the statements in bold aloud and have someone read each Scripture over the group. Allow this to be what anchors you as you leave.

Who I Am In Christ

I am a child of God.

Jesus came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:10-12 NLT)

I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.

You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price.
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT)

Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you.

I have called you by name; you are mine.

For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Others were given in exchange for you.

I traded their lives for yours because you are precious to me.

You are honored, and I love you. (Isaiah 43:1, 3-4 NLT)

I have been adopted as God's child.

Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided

to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son. (Ephesians 1:4-6 MSG)

I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. (Colossians 1:13-14 NLT)

I am complete in Christ.

For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. (Colossians 2:9-10, 12)

I cannot be separated from the love of God.

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39 NLT)

I have not been given a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love and a sound mind.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer for the sake of the Good News. (2 Timothy 1:7-8)

I am God's workmanship and am wonderfully made.

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10 NLT)

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
(Psalms 139:13-16)

I may approach God with freedom and confidence.

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.
(Ephesians 3:12 NLT)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16 NLT)

Close your time together by thanking God for His provision of victory through Christ's redemptive work on the cross.