

LIFEgroup Study Guide

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series, and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
[www.lbf.church/messages]

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big. Contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

- *Contact Pastor Dan:*
danfranklin@lbfchurch.com

Every Thought Captive

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 • Pg. 4-5 • September 5

Lesson 1: The Church Exists to Serve Me

1 Peter 4:10-11 • Pg. 7-9 • September 12

Lesson 2: God Wants Me To Be Comfortable

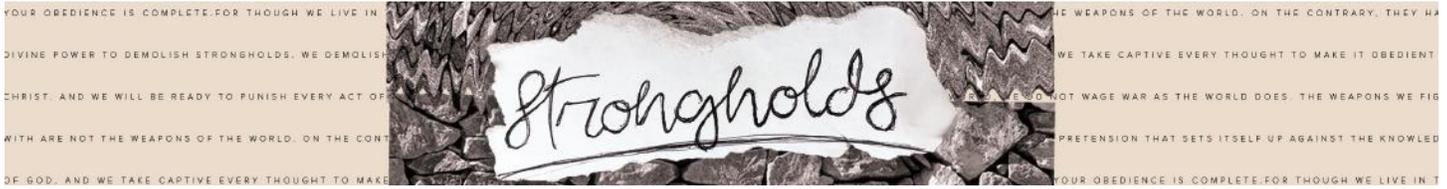
Romans 5:1-5 • Pg. 10-11 • September 19

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Every Thought Captive

September 5 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The main Christian battles are in the world of ideas.

Introduction

It's hard to win a battle if you're unclear who the enemy is. For many Christians, it is tempting to see non-Christians as the enemy, especially if the non-Christians are hostile to us and to Jesus. But the apostle Paul says that, while we are in a battle, it is not a normal flesh and blood battle. It is not Christians vs. Muslims, Democrats vs. Republicans, or Protestants vs. Catholics. And yet, while we are not using tanks or fighter planes, we are in the process of demolishing strongholds.

A stronghold is a military base that is so well fortified that it is nearly impossible to destroy. Strongholds seem to be impenetrable. They take their place in the world and they don't appear to be going anywhere. But Paul says that we, as Christians, demolish these strongholds. And we do so not with physical weapons, but with divine power. God himself is supplying the power to win victories that seem impossible.

What are these strongholds that we demolish? They are arguments. They are pretensions. They are thoughts. To sum up, they are ideas. They are ways of thinking. And they become so embedded into our world and our lives that they seem impossible to remove. And yet those of us who are believers in Jesus, in the power of God, bring every thought into obedience to Christ. We don't allow ourselves to be deceived or distracted by any thought or idea or teaching that opposes the simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every culture has strongholds. Every person is tempted by certain strongholds. The strongholds of ideas are the battleground for believers in Jesus.

Getting Started

1. Name an idea that has had a major impact on your life. Explain how the idea has impacted you.

2. What are some beliefs that are commonly held by American Christians, and yet are contrary to what is taught in the Bible?

Digging In

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 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. 6 And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. What are some ways that the world around us wages war?

5. On a practical level, how do you think God gives believers “divine power to demolish strongholds”?

6. In the realm of ideas and arguments, what are some thoughts that Christians need to “take captive”?

7. In light of the fact that Paul makes clear that our battle is not with worldly weapons, what do you think he means in verse 6 when he talks about punishing acts of disobedience?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Is it possible to wage war against false ideas without waging war against those who hold these false ideas? If so, explain how.

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). How does the salvation that Jesus brought relate to false ideas that lead us into lostness and confusion?

Taking It To Heart

10. The Bible is God’s Word and is his message on what is true. What are some ways that you can be more reliant on the Bible in forming your grid for reality?

11. Identify one false idea that you find yourself regularly tempted to believe. How can you wage war against this false idea?

Strongholds

In 2 Corinthians 10:4 the apostle Paul writes, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” Demolishing a stronghold is no easy task. A stronghold is defined as, “a place that has been fortified so as to protect it against attack.” It is often used to describe a military location. A stronghold is something that is secure. Where other bases may be vulnerable, a stronghold is thought to be safe from any attack from the enemy. And yet Paul says that we—Christians—are given divine power to demolish them.

Paul makes clear that he is not talking about literal military bases. He is talking about arguments, thoughts, ideas. Every culture has strongholds. The strongholds in any culture are the beliefs and ideas that are so deeply held and believed that it seems impossible to oppose them.

And in each of our lives, certain ideas and beliefs have taken root so deeply that it would prove very difficult for us to let go of them and to change our mind. This is important because these strongholds not only impact us when we articulate our beliefs to others; they impact our daily attitudes and actions. They form our grid for reality—our worldview.

Strongholds can be good or bad. If we have embraced deeply the teachings of Jesus Christ, then we will be solid and secure in all the storms that we will face. But if our strongholds are based on worldly thinking, then we are in danger of disaster, deception, and destruction.

This series will focus on many of the strongholds that exist in the United States in the 21st Century. In each lesson we will look at a strongly-held cultural belief, and we will examine it in light of what the Scripture teaches us. The goal of this series is to do exactly what Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians 10:4: To, by God’s divine Word and power, demolish the strongholds that exist in our culture and that lead us astray.

Be ready to be challenged. Be ready to rethink things that seem intuitive. Be ready to change your mind—and your attitudes and actions—on a number of important subjects. And be open to the wisdom of God, and how he leads us to respond to the deepest questions of life.

In all, be ready to adjust your worldview so that it conforms more and more to the truth as God has revealed it.

God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. In verse 10, Peter describes spiritual gifts as “God’s grace in its various forms.” Read Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. According to those passages, what are some of the various forms that spiritual gifts take?

5. Peter says that believers are to be “faithful stewards” of our spiritual gifts. A steward is someone who is given something not so they can own it personally, but so they can care for it on behalf of the one who truly owns it. How does the idea of stewardship impact how we should think about our spiritual gifts?

6. In verse 11, Peter seems to break spiritual gifts into two big categories: speaking and serving. Do you think your gifts relate more to speaking or serving? Explain your answer.

7. Peter ends verse 11 with a sort of benediction. How does his focus on God getting the glory impact how believers should think about the use of their spiritual gifts?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Verse 11 calls believers to speak “the very words of God” and to serve “with the strength God provides.” How do you make active choices to use your gifts while also relying on God to supply the ability to use them?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Everything we have from God is by grace, including our spiritual gifts. How is our ability to receive grace related to how we respond to the message of the gospel of Jesus?

Taking It To Heart

10. What has kept you from being a more faithful steward of the spiritual gifts God has given you?

11. For this next year, how do you think God is calling you to use your gifts to serve God and his people?

boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Focus on verses 1-2. What are some of the benefits of being a believer in Jesus?

5. What do you think it means to “glory in our sufferings”?

6. According to verses 3-4, what are the benefits of suffering?

7. In verses 3-5, Paul describes a chain that starts with suffering and ends with hope. Why do you think it is so important that believers develop true hope?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Do you think that perseverance, character, and hope can be developed without having to suffer? Explain your answer.

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Suffering does not automatically change a person for the better. How does the gospel give believers the foundation that allows us to respond well to suffering?

Taking It To Heart

10. What are some ways that you are holding back from following Jesus because it seems too uncomfortable?

11. How can you respond well to suffering that you are facing, so that it produces perseverance, and character, and hope?



I Am A Good Person

Lesson 3 • September 26 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The Cultural Message

I am a good person.

The Biblical Message

Every person is a hopeless, godless sinner in need of being rescued.

Introduction

Christians spread a message that Jesus died for our sins. But this message falls flat if we think that (1) we don't really have any sins, or (2) if we do have sins, then they certainly aren't so bad that anyone needs to die for them. The gospel of Jesus falls on deaf ears for any of us who have embraced the belief, "I am a good person."

We live in a culture of constant affirmation. When we fall short, we are consistently told it isn't our fault. When our lives become consumed by alcohol or drugs or pornography, we are told we are victims. Parents and coaches and teachers are constantly told to speak only positive messages, without corrections or punishments. All of this adds up to one clear conclusion: We think we are good people. We may have our quirks and even flaws, but in the end we just need a word of encouragement and a nudge in the right direction. We're not sinners heading toward judgment, we are well-meaning people heading toward self-improvement.

This cultural view is so embedded in our minds that it feels blasphemous to challenge it. Yet when we read the Bible we get a completely different message. In this lesson we will challenge the cultural message that we are good people. And the good news is that we will find that only when we have abandoned the belief in our own goodness can we experience the profound and rescuing love of God.

Getting Started

1. Why do you think the average American thinks he or she is a "good person?"

2. What are some pros and cons to our cultural of positive affirmation as opposed to negative correction?

Digging In

Read Romans 5:6-11.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but

we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. In verses 6-8, Paul uses three words to describe people for whom Christ died: Powerless, Ungodly, Sinners. Write down what you think each of these words means.

5. How do verses 6-8 speak to someone who claims to be a “good person”?

6. Verses 9-10 say that we were saved from “God’s wrath” because we were his “enemies.” What do these verses say about God’s attitude toward our sin?

7. This passage emphasizes the great love of God because Christ died for us (verses 6 and 8), shedding his blood (verse 9) in order to reconcile us to God (verse 11). How does your understanding of God’s love change when you embrace the biblical teaching that you are not a “good person”?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Many of us cling to the idea that we are “good” because we find our sense of self-esteem in it. If you can’t hold onto the idea that you have value for being a good person, how can you believe that you have any value?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. The goal of all that Jesus did for us was reconciliation to God (verse 11). How can you live more fully in the joy of being reconciled to God?

Taking It To Heart

10. Knowing that the cultural message that we are all “good people” is an obstacle to the gospel of Jesus, how can you talk to others with kindness and love without reinforcing this harmful message?

11. How can you more fully find your identity in God’s great love for you as opposed to your great moral goodness?



I Need To Love Myself

Lesson 4 • October 3 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The Cultural Message

I need to love myself.

The Biblical Message

Growth in godliness is marked by a shrinking self-love and an increasing love for others.

Introduction

Most of us frequently feel fragile and insecure. We feel doubtful of our own value and our place in this world. Because of this, popular psychology has pointed us toward self-esteem, self-compassion, and self-care, all of which are subsets of self-love. We are told that we cannot fill the void inside of us through the approval of others (this is true), so we must fill it by loving ourselves (this is false).

Not one single passage in the Bible instructs people to love themselves. Some think that Jesus did when he said, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But that was not Jesus saying, “Love your neighbor and love yourself.” That was Jesus saying, “Love your neighbor in the same way that you already love yourself.” Similarly, in Ephesians 5:28-29 when Paul urges husbands to love their wives he says, “In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.” Self-love is not commanded; it is assumed. In fact, Paul warns of self-love in 1 Timothy 3:1-2: “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be loves of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.” Love of self is a vice right alongside pride, abuse, and unholiness.

This lesson will walk through a passage that calls us away from self-love, and toward true biblical love. This lesson will also explore the fact that we all clearly need to be loved. But this void is filled, not with self-love, but with God’s amazing, generous, unbreakable love.

Getting Started

1. Why do you think the value of self-love is so popular in our culture?
2. What do you see as some of the results of our culture of self-love?

Digging In

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Before Paul gives any commands in this passage, he writes verse 1, which reminds us of the benefits we have in Jesus. Which of the four benefits in verse 1 most stands out to you, and why?

5. Why do you think Paul gave the reminders of God's benefits to us in verse 1 before giving the commands in verse 2?

6. Give a response to this statement: "Selfish ambition" and "vain conceit" are Paul's definition of self-love.

7. How does humility (verse 3) relate to showing care for others (verses 3-4)?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. What do you think is the difference between unhealthy self-love and a healthy view of your own value before God?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. The gospel tells us that Jesus died to save sinners (Romans 5:8), and he is now working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). How does this message empower us to abandon selfishness and to love others?

Taking It To Heart

10. In what ways do you think our culture's message about self-love has impacted your own attitudes and actions?

11. What do you think is your next step of following Jesus into a life marked by sacrificing for others rather than taking care of yourself?