



## spiritual strongholds

by Vic Black, National Prayer Director

<sup>3</sup>For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.

<sup>4</sup>For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup>We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

—2 Corinthians 10:3-5

The Old Testament refers several times to a “stronghold,” meaning an actual physical structure used for protection in war (1 Sam 24:22), or else God Himself as a spiritual Stronghold (Ps 9:9). In the New Testament, however, the word “stronghold” appears only in 2 Cor 10:4.

From the context of verse 5, our thoughts are the breeding ground for spiritual strongholds. *The Message* paraphrases *arguments* and *lofty opinions* as *warped philosophies* and *barriers erected against the truth of God*. These and other translations convey a sense of debate or disbelief about truths of God’s Word. A stronghold challenges what God says about Himself, about me, and about the world around me.

We could define a stronghold as a well-established system of thinking that is alien to the true knowledge of God, or even in opposition to it. As we debate, reason, argue, and develop strong opinions contrary to the will, mind, and truth of God, Satan gains a foothold. Brick by brick, we build a fortress within which Satan influences our thoughts.

For most of my life, I saw myself as significantly less than other people. I grew up with

deep roots of shame that served as a filter through which I viewed life. Without even realizing I was doing it, I assigned more power, authority, and value to others, and demeaned myself. Two problems with this way of thinking: It wrought havoc in my close relationships, and *it was completely contrary to what God said was true about me*.

When I recognized that I was dishonoring God and damaging relationships, I realized I needed serious help. How do you stop thinking the way you’ve always thought? I needed to repent, but repentance was another misunderstood truth. I saw it as a big corrective effort I had to make to clean up my mess. But in Romans 2:4, God calls us and woos us into repentance: “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” I began to see repentance as a mysterious truth of heaven that God brings down and inserts into our human equation. It is not of this world, and it gives us a taste of Kingdom citizenship. Embracing David’s repentance in Psalm 51, I made it my own. I did business with God! I cried out to God for help and mercy.

Over the next days and weeks, the changes in my life astonished me and the people closest to me. Old patterns of sin lost their power as God demolished my stronghold of wrong thinking. All I did was sincerely repent. God Himself cleaned up my inner sanctuary.

I encourage you to use Psalm 139:23,24 very personally as you partner with God to reveal any strongholds. Here’s a suggested prayer: “Search my heart and mind, O God, examine my systems of thinking. Please know me thoroughly. I invite you to test me and know my thoughts that push me into anxiety and distress. Reveal any hurtful way of thinking to which I’m prone. Lead me into your truth and set me free.”

## spiritual warfare

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to follow hard after God, but if your *desire* isn’t supported by your *will*, your walk with God will be impotent. The same holds true as we battle the devil. We may want to resist him, but he won’t yield. If we exercise our will to resist him, though, he must flee (James 4:7). Augustine characterized Satan as a yapping dog. A dog doesn’t run from you just because you want it to; exercising your will by stomping your foot and saying, “Go!” sends the dog scampering with its tail between its legs.

**Renounce**—One way to exert your will is to renounce or close the door opener you’ve allowed in your life. Laborers must use spiritual weapons to fight spiritual issues. Praying through the Personal Spiritual Warfare (on the next page) helps to renew perspective and gives an opportunity to identify any door openers you may have allowed in your life. Once you’ve identified a door opener you can, by an act of your will, pray something like, “*Heavenly Father, in the name, power and authority of Jesus Christ, I choose to renounce the door opener of \_\_\_\_\_ that I have allowed in my life. I ask you to take back any ground I may have given the enemy. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*”

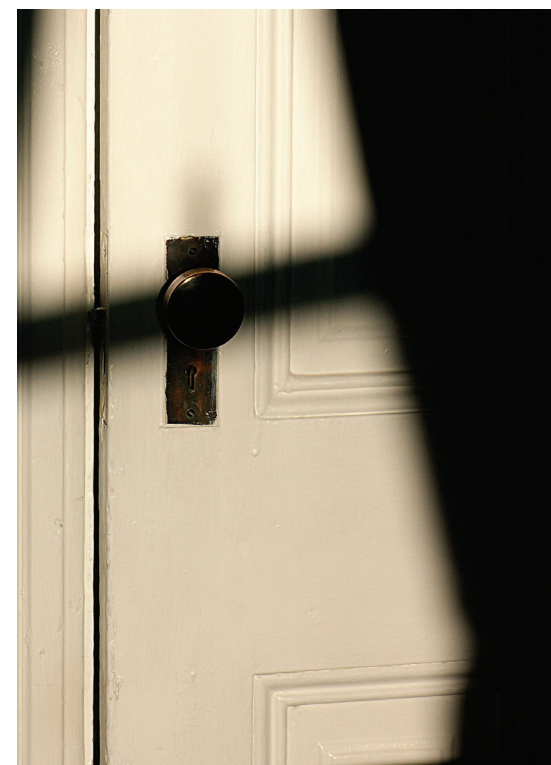
**Stand Firm**—Once you renounce, you need to stand firm - by faith not surrendering the ground you’ve taken. When Jesus was hungry and weak after forty days of fasting, the devil came to tempt him. Jesus didn’t try to overpower the enemy. Instead, by faith he stood firm in the commands and promises of God and resisted the evil one.

Paul commands us in Ephesians 6:11-14 to stand against the devil’s schemes, stand your ground, and *stand firm*. Standing firm is the battle we face after closing any doors of demonic interference.

Once you’ve identified an open door, you should Submit, Resist, Renounce, and Stand Firm. Simple—just not easy.

Have you opened any doors that could give the enemy permission to interfere in your life and ministry?

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a pattern of sin that  
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life and ministry.*



## personal spiritual warfare

by Steve Brown

In J.R.R. Tolkien’s famous trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*, Gollum’s lust for the ring ruined his life. He was physically transformed, emotionally tormented, and held in spiritual bondage to the ring and to the evil power behind it. The ring consumed all his normal desires and controlled his life.

It’s just a story, of course...but like all great stories, it was built on principles of truth. Through his lust for the ring, Gollum opened a door that allowed the enemy to interfere with his life. And we can do the same.



Steve Brown

### Door Openers For Demonic Interference

Ephesians 4:26 says, *In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry...* But Paul isn’t finished with his thought. He continues in verse 27 - *and do not give the devil a foothold*. Paul links anger with giving the devil a foothold, or a place to stand. A foothold gives the enemy a beach-head or permission to interfere in our lives and ministries. It’s like giving the devil a building permit.

Paul makes another connection in 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, *If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes*. Here Paul points to unforgiveness (or bitterness) as playing into the Satan’s schemes.

A door opener is a pattern of sin that gives the enemy an opportunity to interfere in a person’s life and ministry. This pattern opens the door to the enemy, allows demonic interference, and plays into the devil’s schemes. Along with anger and unforgiveness, some other door openers are:

- ⊕ Fear (2 Tim 1:7-8; 1 John 3:18)
- ⊕ Flesh/Lust (1 John 2:15-16)
- ⊕ Pride (Proverbs 13:10; 2 Timothy 2:23-26).

When these emotions or patterns have been consistently harbored and practiced over a long time, they become door openers. A flare of anger or episode of pride won’t necessarily establish a foothold, but if the pattern of anger or pride isn’t dealt with and becomes habitual, a door will eventually open.

Lust was Gollum’s door opener. His first encounter with the ring ended in violence, but if he had repented then and turned away from his sin, evil would have found no opening. Instead, Gollum fled with the ring and lived in secrecy and darkness, seduced into allowing himself to become dominated by the enemy.

How do you know if you have an open door?

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## spiritual warfare

by Dave Legg

When we decided to address spiritual warfare in *UpFront*, we didn't realize how difficult it would be to decide on a direction. There are many different views on this subject. We want it to be both biblical and practical enough to be helpful. The spiritual battle we fight is intense. Often believers avoid this topic because of controversy over doctrine or fear of the demonic. This avoidance could be disastrous, because the battle is indeed real. We hope this is helpful so the enemy will not have an advantage or an open door in your life and ministry. Remember the basics: submit to God, resist the devil, renounce any openings you have given the enemy, and stand firm in Christ.



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## personal spiritual warfare

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### Possible Signs of Demonic Interference

Many of us have been in situations where we feel stuck and unable to break free. Here are some questions to help you determine if you might have an open door.

- ⊕ Is there *resistance of wills*? (Unwillingness to seek help or move toward others)
- ⊕ Is there *confusion*? (Not sure what's the problem or issue)
- ⊕ Are there *irrational responses*? (Responses don't make sense)
- ⊕ Are there *out-of-proportion responses*? (Response is an overreaction to the stimulus)
- ⊕ Is there *doubting God*? (Difficulty trusting God or unusual fear)
- ⊕ Does the problem *resist normal solutions*? (Can't figure out how to solve the issue)

If you can answer yes to any of these questions, you may have an open door. If you have an open door, what should you do?



### How Do You Deal with Door Openers?

Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.  
—James 4:7

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering.  
—1 Peter 5:8, 9

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.  
—Ephesians 6:11

**Submit**—Focus first on submission, or yielding to God. Usually when I've struggled with an intense emotion like anger or fear, it's a sign that I haven't been yielding to God in some area. Submitting includes not only my actions but my thoughts: I need to think about things the same way God does. Submitting my actions and thoughts to God begins the process of freeing me from my door opener.

**Resist**—In the spiritual realm, will has more power than desire. You may want

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## personal spiritual warfare tool

How do you close any open doors for demonic interference? In a time of quiet before the Lord:

- ⊕ Make application of 1 John 1:9, confessing any known sin.
- ⊕ Work through the six questions in the previous page to consider if you might have a door opener in your life.
- ⊕ Ask God, "Is there a specific door opener in my life?"
- ⊕ Exert your will and pray, renouncing any door openers God brings to mind.

Praying through the following Personal Spiritual Warfare Prayer is an application of Ephesians 6:10-13 where we are exhorted to use spiritual weapons against spiritual forces. If God brings any doors openers to mind, write them down, and renounce them specifically. If God does not bring any to mind, renounce them generally. You could pray something like:

Heavenly Father, I bow in worship and prayer before You. I worship You and give You praise, recognizing that You are worthy to receive all glory and honor and praise. I surrender myself completely and unreservedly in every area of my life to You. I take my stand against all the workings of Satan that would hinder me. God, I acknowledge that all principalities and powers and all evil spirits are subject to You. Heavenly Father, in the name, power, and authority of Jesus Christ, I choose to renounce any door openers that I have allowed in my life. I ask you to take back any ground I have given the enemy and fill me with your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Now that you have prayed through this personal spiritual warfare prayer and closed any open doors, you have just taken away any opportunity you had given the devil. Rejoice and stand firm. Feel free to pray through this prayer regularly.



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