

Week 3 Devotions: Freedom from Captivity to Mental Strongholds

Colossians 2:8 warns, *“Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.”* Part of the anointing of the Spirit that came upon Jesus is the anointing *“to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1)*. Wherever we are trapped in darkness and held captive by humanistic and demonic ways of thinking, Jesus comes with light to set us free. *“The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8)*. He accomplished this by giving us the Spirit to guide us into truth. With the Spirit’s help 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” (1 Corinthians 10:5)*. We open our mind and heart in worship to receive this ministry from the Lord.

Listen to Steffany Gretzinger’s “Out of Hiding/Father’s Song” on YouTube (lyrics below). As you listen, picture Jesus unlocking prison doors where you’ve been held captive. See yourself leaving shackles behind and running to Jesus in freedom. Worship him for choosing the cross out of love for you.

Come out of hiding, you're safe here with me
There's no need to cover what I already see
You've got your reasons, but I hold your peace
You've been on lockdown and I hold the key

'Cause I loved you before you knew it was love
And I saw it all, still, I chose the cross
And you were the one that I was thinking of when I rose from the grave
Now rid of the shackles, my victory is yours
I tore the veil for you to come close
There's no reason to stand at a distance anymore, you're not far from home

I'll be your lighthouse when you're lost at sea
And I will illuminate everything
No need to be frightened by intimacy
No, just throw off your fear and come running to me

'Cause I loved you before you knew it was love
And I saw it all, still, I chose the cross
And you were the one that I was thinking of when I rose from the grave
Now rid of the shackles, my victory is yours
I tore the veil for you to come close
There's no reason to stand at a distance anymore, you're not far from home

You're not far from home. Keep on coming
And oh, as you run what hindered love will only become part of the story (repeat)

Baby, you're almost home now. Please, don't quit now
You're almost home to me (repeat)

Prayer and journal prompt: Whether you feel you’re at the beginning or end of the journey described in this song, praise God that he’s with you on the journey, loving you and fighting for you. Tell him you want healing and thank him in advance for the healing he’s going to do in your life because he loves you.

Day 2: A Renewed Mind About the Father's Love for Me

Invite the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and give you God's thoughts toward you as you pray Psalm 139 aloud. Surrender your imagination and step into an encounter with your Creator who loves you.

"O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me." (Picture yourself laying on an examination table with God listening to your heart and to your innermost thoughts.) ² *You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.*

³ *You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.* (Now picture yourself driving in your car with Jesus beside you and the voice of the Holy Spirit as your GPS, helping you navigate. The presence of Jesus makes you at ease.) *You know everything I do.* ⁴ *You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.*

⁵ *You go before me and follow me.* (Picture your heavenly Father checking the road ahead of you for obstacles, then coming to teach you how to ride a bicycle. He holds on until you get the hang of it, then lets you pedal while he follows close behind, keeping an eye on you to make sure you're safe. You ride with confidence, knowing he's right there cheering you on. When you return, he puts his hand on your head and blesses you.) *You place your hand of blessing on my head.* ⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!*

⁷ *I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!* (Imagine the Lord enveloping you in a cloud of his tangible presence. You are lifted up in the cloud and begin to soar, going up and down like an exhilarating swing ride. You look down at one point and realize that the giant arm moving you through the air is the arm of Almighty God, lifting you up above his head like a little baby and spinning in circles while you look down at his smiling face and squeal with delight.) ⁸ *If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.* ⁹ *If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,* ¹⁰ *even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.*

¹¹ *I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night—*¹² *but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.* (Imagine that you are a little child playing peekaboo with the Father. You cover your eyes with your hands and experience a moment of darkness, but all you have to do is open your eyes to see the Father's face shining with love. He never left, even when you couldn't see.) *To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you.*

¹³ *You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.* (Imagine a craftsman pulling a thought out of his imagination as a long thread that spells your name. He weaves the thread into an image of you, carefully adding special touches here and there. Once his masterpiece is a completed thought, he takes one of the threads and sews it into your mother's womb. Breathing life onto the thread a baby is formed. He records every good plan he imagined in a book with your name on it.) ¹⁴ *Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.* ¹⁵ *You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.* ¹⁶ *You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.*

¹⁷ *How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!* ¹⁸ *I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!*

Prayer and journal prompt: Ask God to bring pictures to your mind of how he sees you, then wait for them to form. Thank him for his precious thoughts about you that outnumber the grains of sand! **Worship Encounter:** Listen to the song, "Psalm 139," by Ellie Holcomb on YouTube with your eyes closed and worship.

Day 3: Removing Toxic Thought Trees with the Father

Enter into communion with the Lord by worshiping Jesus and thanking him for his blood which gives you access to the Most Holy Place with the Father. (You can take communion or simply give thanks for Jesus' body and blood that made a way for you to draw near in fellowship with God.) Invite the living water of the Spirit to wash you clean of all negative thoughts and emotions, releasing forgiveness toward those who offend you, including yourself. Enter the Holy Place with a clean conscience, ready to receive the light of revelation by the Spirit and enjoy the bread of Jesus' presence. Cast all your cares on Jesus, thanking him that he cares for you enough to remove all sin and sickness from you.

Thank God for what he's done, is doing, and will do. From this place of thanksgiving and worship, in the safety of God's love for you, picture yourself as a little child taking the Father's hand and entering a garden filled with trees. Some of the trees are small, not yet mature enough to bear fruit. Some trees are tall and need a little pruning, so they don't block the light from getting to the smaller trees nearby. Some trees are diseased and threaten to poison the other trees nearby. You ask the Father where you are and he answers, "Your mind."

You ask, "What should we do about the diseased trees?" He pulls out a shovel and says, "We need to remove them at the root, so they don't grow again and cause damage in the garden." As you approach one of the trees, you see etched in its bark, "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." You ask the Father, "What knowledge is making this tree unhealthy." He replies, "It is your understanding of good and evil based on human reasoning apart from connection to me. When you examine the good and bad things that have happened to you and come to a conclusion about yourself that doesn't line up with who you are in Christ, that knowledge becomes greater in your mind than my truth. When that thought seed gets planted, if you water it by returning to it again and again, meditating on that thought, it will grow into a diseased tree. The longer it stays, the more deeply it gets rooted in your mind, affecting your attitudes, emotions, and beliefs."

You look at the Father's tender, compassionate eyes, and realize that as much as he loves you, he won't remove the tree without your permission. Taking the shovel from his hand, you see the words "truth" etched into the handle. Hearing the question forming in your mind, the Father answers, "When you get a handle on the truth, you will be empowered to uproot that tree because truth sets you free." As you begin to dig, there is resistance from the hard, dry ground at first. The Father pulls out a pitcher of living water and pours it on the ground. Again, answering your unspoken question, he says, "When you invite the Spirit of truth to help you uproot diseased thought trees, he begins to soften the ground by reminding you that you are safe and loved. You don't need to be afraid of digging with him." Taking a deep breath, you welcome the help of the Spirit.

Taking hold of the handle of truth, you return to digging. With each strike at the dirt, memories flood your mind from your past that are connected to the tree until suddenly, you're standing underneath the tree. It seems to be suspended in midair so you can look at it from every angle. You examine each root and branch with the Father, noticing the grief in his eyes when you were in pain. He looks at you with love that wraps around you like a warm blanket as he says, "It pained me when you were hurt. That was not my will for you."

Prayer and journal prompt: In the safety of the Father's love and desire to make you whole, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind any toxic thought that has become rooted in your mind. It may be a phrase like, "I'm not good enough." Ask the Holy Spirit to show the root of that tree, the events you interpreted in a negative way. Ask the Lord to show you how he was loving you in each memory, inviting the light of Jesus to expose the darkness where the enemy has been hiding. Worship Jesus for his light and love, for his joy in setting you free.

Day 4: Demolishing Mental Strongholds with the Sword of the Spirit

Come back to the garden with the Father by simply worshiping him as a good Father. If desired, listen to “Dancing on the Waves” by Bethel Music on YouTube and let the Father’s love wash over you as you visualize yourself dancing on the waves with your loving Father who created you. Spend a few moments worshiping the Father for how much he loves you and desires good things for you.

Secure in the love of the Father, you return to the diseased thought tree you examined the day before. You see that the tree is tethered to your mind by a cord. That cord is a lie about God or yourself that you feel is true in your heart. Until the emotional connection you have to the lie is severed, the tree remains rooted in your mind. You can see that there is writing on the cord, but it is too small to read. The Father says, “You need spirit eyes to see it.” Taking a pair of glasses from the Father’s hand, you invite the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your understanding as you put them on. Now you can see the writing on the cord. It says... (Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you any lie you believe in your heart is true, like “I am not loved.”)

You reach for the shovel to sever the cord when the Father says, “You need a different tool now.” You look down and discover that the shovel in your hand has become a sword with the name “Word of God” etched into the sharp blade. It feels too heavy to lift. The Father says, “You’ll be able to wield the sword with authority when you believe what the Bible says is true for you personally.” You then ask the Holy Spirit to give you the truth from scripture that will empower you to sever the diseased thought from your mind. He says...

Prayer and journal pause: Record in your journal whatever scripture the Holy Spirit brings to your mind and meditate on it until you can wield the sword with authority. If the scripture doesn’t feel true for you, keep listening to the Holy Spirit and press in for additional revelation of God’s love for you until it does.

When you’re ready to confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is your Savior, Redeemer, Friend, Bridegroom, Shepherd, Defender, King, High Priest and Advocate, pick up the Sword of the Spirit (with your hands as a prophetic act) and physically go through the motion of striking down the cord of that lie as you renounce it and declare scripture truth with your mouth.

Example: I renounce the lie that “I am not good enough” and believe the truth that Jesus is good enough to satisfy every demand of the Father because he perfectly fulfilled the law on my behalf (Hebrews 10:14). I am hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3); therefore, when I come to the Father, I am part of Christ’s body because I am one with him as his beloved bride (1 Corinthians 6:17). God sees me as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). The Holy Spirit carries on every good work in me to completion (Philippians 1:6). When I am weak, God is strong because his grace makes up for my lack (2 Corinthians 12:9). I can do good works with Jesus and release it to the Holy Spirit to finish (John 15). My identity is not based on what I do for God, but on who God is to me and who I am in Christ: a beloved child, chosen bride, obedient sheep, royal priest, and snake trampler!

As you wield the Sword of the Spirit with authority, in a confident spirit of praise to God for his goodness to you, now command every demon attached to that oppressive thought to leave your body and soul in Jesus’ name. Visualize the tree crashing down and demons who were hanging out on the branches fleeing in every direction as the light of Jesus hits the tree, shattering it into pieces. Breathe in the air of freedom as the Holy Spirit fills you. Invite him to flow as living water to the empty place where the tree was and wash away all pain connected to that lie. Invite him to plant a new tree of life based on the truth you now believe.

Prayer and journal prompt: Write down the truth you now believe and scriptures connected to it. Read and declare them aloud every morning for the next two months to water in the new tree so it gets rooted in your mind. It takes 63 days to change a thought habit, so keep at it until your beliefs are all aligned to scripture!

Day 5: Picking Up Shattered Pieces of the Soul

Listen to the song, “Defender” by Francesca Battistelli and Steffany Gretzinger on YouTube. Picture Jesus as the Defender of your heart who is taking you to the places where pieces of your soul were shattered to gather them up and put you back together. As you pray the lyrics to Jesus, picture him fighting for you while you simply bow and worship.

You go before I know that You've even gone to win my war.
You come back with the head of my enemy. You come back and You call it my victory.

You go before I know that You've even gone to win my war.
Your love becomes my greatest defense. It leads me from the dry wilderness.

And all I did was praise. All I did was worship. All I did was bow down. All I did was stay still.

Hallelujah, You have saved me. So much better Your way.
Hallelujah, great Defender. So much better Your way

You know before I do where my heart can seek to find Your truth.
Your mercy is the shade I'm living in. And You restore my faith and hope again.

And all I did was praise. All I did was worship. All I did was bow down. All I did was stay still.

Hallelujah, You have saved me. So much better Your way.
Hallelujah, great Defender. So much better Your way

When I thought I lost me, you knew where I left me. You reintroduced me to Your love.
You picked up all my pieces, put me back together. You are the defender of my heart.
(Repeat)

Hallelujah, You have saved me. So much better this way.
Hallelujah, great Defender. So much better Your way.

And all I did was praise. All I need to do is worship. Lord, I will just bow down. I'm just gonna stay still.

Prayer and journal prompt: God gives us the freedom to amputate part of our soul so we can survive, but as our Healer he wants to make us whole. Ask Jesus to show you where any shattered pieces of your soul were left behind so that you could keep going in spite of the pain. As he takes you to a time in your life that needs restoration, worship him as your Redeemer who redeems your past. Ask him to show you how he was loving you then and is redeeming that situation now.

Hand Jesus each shattered piece and invite him to make you whole again as you release forgiveness and receive forgiveness, if needed. Journal what he says to you as he restores you to wholeness, replacing any toxic thought connected to that situation with his loving truth. Journal and declare over yourself whatever he says in agreement with heaven. Worship Jesus for being your Redeemer, Defender and Healer who makes you whole.