

When Pigs Fly Series – Part 3

Overcoming Our Strongholds

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We are in the middle of a series called **When Pigs Fly**. That phrase is often used as a way of saying something is impossible. It will never happen. But in this series, we are confronting that skepticism with a faith that believes all things are possible with God.

So far, we looked at God's miracle working power in healings **our bodies** and in healing **broken relationships**.

This morning we are going to look at God's power in setting us free from strongholds. Or as they say in Celebrate Recovery – being set free from our hurts, habits and hang-ups.

In all of these areas God looks for our cooperation and participation. In most cases he asks us to do something as an expression of our faith. It could be as simple as asking for prayer or more difficult like forgiving someone.

- **Many times, our freedom comes as we get involved in a group so people can help us on our journey to freedom.**

Jesus came to set us free from life's bondages. This is our inheritance as his children. Jesus describes his ministry to the world in Luke 4.

LUKE. 4:14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Something I say a lot is that *we are all broken people*. We are all in the process of recovery from something. Life throws us curve balls and we have an enemy who is trying to destroy God's destiny in our lives.

- **We live in an imperfect world**
- **We are hurt by other people**
- **We hurt other people**
- **We hurt ourselves**

I like God's promise to us in **Isaiah 57:18**

I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him.

There is hope for each of us. God is for us. God sees our ways. He sees our bondages and habits and he promises to help us, to heal us, guide us and restore us.

- He helps put our broken lives back together.

I like the story of - A father who was trying to take a nap on a Sunday afternoon and his little boy kept bugging him saying “Daddy I'm bored”. So, his father trying to make up a game found a picture of a globe in the newspaper. A picture of the world! And he ripped it up into about 50 pieces and said “now son this is a puzzle. I want you to put it all back together. He laid down to finish his nap thinking he would get another hour and a half to two hours of sleep. But in about 15 minutes the little boy woke him up and said “Daddy I got it finished” The father said “Your kidding” He knew his son didn't know all the positions of the nations and things like that so he said “How did you do that?” He said **“Well dad when I turned the pieces over, I found a picture of a person on the back and when I got my person put together the world looked just fine.**

That's the way it is with life. When we get our person put together the world looks a lot better to us.

God wants to put the pieces of our lives back together.

The principles of healing and wholeness are found in the Bible. In it are the keys to life.

No matter what problems you and I may be struggling with this morning **the way to recovery and freedom are the same.**

Let me share **four biblical truths** that will help us no matter how big or small our struggle or stronghold might be. After that we have a **testimony** of someone that overcame some strongholds in his life. His story will encourage all of us.

Let's begin with the very **first step** we all need to start with.

1. To overcome a problem, we must first admit we have a problem.

This seems pretty simple, but it is amazing how we dance around our issues to avoid taking responsibility and simply admitting we have a problem – It's hard for many of us to say – *“I have a problem and I need help.”*

We think it is a sign of weakness to admit our problem. Or we struggle with pride and what other people will think if we ask for help.

- **So, we live in denial** – I don't have a problem – refuse help - I got this. I can handle it. I can stop whenever I want, I'm fine
- **Or we shift the blame and focus** – It is my spouse who has the problem. She/He makes me act this way. You would too. Drives me crazy
- **Or we minimize** – My problem is not as bad as so and so. Not a big deal
- **Or we over spiritualize** – it is the devil – it's all his fault. Just pray more
- **Or we rationalize** – complex explanations why we are the way we are

But until we **humble ourselves** and call it what it is, **break the secrecy, break the lie**, get it **into the light and ask for help** we will not get the victory and healing we want.

Obadiah 1:3 The pride of your heart has deceived you, (NIV) pride=deception

1 John 1:8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. (NLT)

James explains how we are to deal with our issues.

James 5:16 Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. (MSG)

So, until we become honest and admit we have a problem and allow others to help us, we will never come into victory in that area of our life.

2. The place of strength begins with complete total surrender to God and wise counsel.

This means - We stop fighting. Stop the excuses. Stop the lies. Stop the bargaining. Stop the games. Stop the false humility, stop the control. We come to the place where we lay it all down including our reputation and pride.

True spiritual surrender is far from passive and never forced—it is a willful act of obedience. I am here because I want to be here.

We empty ourselves at the cross and ask Jesus to heal us and put us back together.

We become that **broken clay on the potter's wheel**. We may feel like we are crushed and broken. But trusting God to remove the defects and to remake us with his loving hands. Which he will do if we stay on his potter's wheel.

Part of godly surrender is submitting **to the godly counsel of others** who have our best interest in mind. Allowing others to speak correction into your life.

The place of brokenness and full surrender is a very vulnerable place but a place where God's tender mercies flow into your life. You begin to know God as your father in a whole new way.

Listen to King David's prayer when he fully surrendered and repented before God.

Psalm 51:17,10-12 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

3. Rely on God's power to overcome and to walk in sustained victory.

God gives us his power to overcome our hurts and habits. **Our own willpower is not enough.** We need God to help us.

We need his power to **close the doors** that give Satan entry into our lives. Close the doors to unhealthy relationships, practices and desires.

We need his power to **renew our minds** so that we begin to think differently, respond differently and desire differently.

Behavior modification alone will never work. We need heart transformation and mind renewal.

2 Timothy 1:7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. (NIV)

Romans 12:2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. (NLT)

The Holy Spirit creates in us both the desire to change and the power to change.

That is his miracle working power at work transforming our lives and breaking every stronghold.

4. Follow thru and walk in accountability.

It is sad how often people come to the place of full surrender and God begins to breakoff the old patterns and then they just stop. There is no follow thru. It's as if they say *"Ok God, I got it from here. Thanks for your help I can do the rest on my own."*

So, they **drop out** of counseling or the program they are in. They drop out of the small group or support group. Church attendance begins to lag. Prayer life goes south.

And slowly the old patterns and strongholds begin to take over again. I have seen this so often and it breaks my heart.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way:

Galatians 3: 3 How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? (NLT)

Being accountable to someone is a powerful way in which God helps us to walk in victory. We need someone other than our spouse to ask how we are doing and to encourage us in the journey of transformation and wholeness.

If you are struggling with a stronghold in your life you will most likely need someone else to help you overcome it. God designed us for community. He did not equip us to do life alone. We desperately need each other.

Drop the façade. Lay down your pride and ask for help. As you humble your self God will lift you up.

Here is a testimony of someone who did just that.

TESTIMONY: I would like Karl Stoltzfus to come and share his story with us. Carl serves as one of the leaders in Celebrate Recovery and has experienced God's transforming power in overcoming some of the strongholds in his life.