

## WEEK 3

### DESTROYING THE STRONGHOLDS OF FAMILY DYSFUNCTION (PART 1)

Welcome back to week 3 of Think Differently.

By this point, the phrase “nothing is different until you think differently” should be a fairly constant theme running in the back of your mind as you go about your days. Last week, we looked at demolishing the strongholds that we have in our dispositions, rooting out arguments and lofty opinions to bring our thinking into captivity to obey Christ. The next two weeks, we will confront an equally daunting battleground—the strongholds created by our family of origin.

Here’s a fair warning: What you have learned about your disposition should help you understand some of the ways your family background has shaped you. As you consider the teaching this week and next, keep your disposition in mind. You may discover that some of the strongholds in your life are the result of your temperament coping with the home culture in which you grew up.

Use the following questions to open the discussion.

**How have the last two weeks of teaching affected the way you think?**

**Now that you are aware of your disposition, what differences have you noticed this past week in your interactions with others?**

**Tell about one way in which your family background has shaped something you do almost every day.**

To continue working on the memory Bible passage for this series, read together the following verses before watching the DVD segment:

*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.*

#### 2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6

### COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH DVD SESSION 3.

There are no \_\_\_\_\_ for generational sins, but there are \_\_\_\_\_.

Some of the most obvious generational strongholds:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Exposing the bad decisions battles:

1. Where to \_\_\_\_\_—family vs. favorable?
2. Who to \_\_\_\_\_—attraction vs. character?
3. \_\_\_\_\_ group—easy vs. beneficial friendships?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ time—me vs. others?
5. Life \_\_\_\_\_—self vs. God?

### DISCUSS THE DVD SEGMENT WITH YOUR GROUP, USING THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

Compared to the strongholds in our dispositions that we talked about last week, which seems like the bigger battle for you: temperament strongholds or family dysfunction strongholds? Why?

Besides the habitual lying that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob illustrate as a generational sin, what other habits or behaviors might be generational sins?

Rather than blaming parents or previous generations for generational sins, what positive actions can we take when we recognize those strongholds in our lives?

In dealing with conflict resolution, would you say your family of origin was more fight, flight, or a mix? How about your present family (if you are married)?

James introduced the category of bad decision-making strongholds and offered five significant examples: where to live, who to marry, peer group choices, leisure time choices, and priorities. Which of these resonated with hard experiences in your life?

How did you respond to his indication of a preferred choice for each: family in living considerations, character in marriage choice, beneficial factors in peer associations, others as the focus of leisure, and the importance of godly priorities? Which would you like to discuss in greater depth?

**Application:** For each of the dysfunction strongholds in this lesson (generational sin, conflict resolution, and bad decision-making), try to identify at least one possible example in your own life. Ask the Lord to do what it will take to demolish those strongholds. Take a few minutes with the group to pray with each other asking for God's help in learning to think differently during these weeks.

This week's Scripture memory.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 2*  
**CORINTHIANS 10:4**

**Assignment:** Complete the daily lessons for this next week in preparation for the next group experience. Consider spending some time in the Book of Proverbs. Let those practical statements address some of your decision-making. Make a note of further questions or thoughts related to this week's teaching that you can share with other group members. Pray for each of your group by name, asking God to help them think differently this week.

The DVD session notes for this week included the memory verse that is part of the foundation passage for this entire series, [2 Corinthians 10:3-6](#). We are now looking at the strongholds that crowd our family history and create all kinds of dysfunctions. [Second Corinthians 10:4-5](#) give us hope in the battlefield:

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

Let me remind you that it is God's Word that renews our mind—the washing of the Word. By memorizing this Scripture, you'll already be heading in the right direction. When we memorize, we hide God's Word in our hearts. David said, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" ([Ps. 119:11](#)). When facing temptation (see [Matt. 4:1-11](#)), Jesus pulled out the sword of the Spirit (see [Eph. 6:17](#)) and used God's Word to destroy strongholds. When James says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" ([Jas. 4:7](#)), the Word of God resists the enemy.

The battlefield tactic of taking every thought captive to obey Christ means we're choosing our thoughts. I don't have to let thoughts come into my head unbidden. I don't let my mind wander into wallowing over hurt, the past, and things that can't change. You and I can choose our thoughts. We can center our minds on the things of God and live in victory. It all comes down to what we think about.

I want to challenge you to memorize these verses—to hide them in your heart. Use them to demolish strongholds, the fortified places in your thinking. One place we can attack them is in our family dysfunctions.

## DAY 1

### RECON ON FAMILY DYSFUNCTION STRONGHOLDS

Today we want to begin some concentrated thinking about destroying the strongholds in our family of origin. It will take us two weeks to survey some of the most persistent ways in which dysfunctions create fixed patterns that become strongholds in our families. God's Word gives us an extended case study of a family, their strongholds included, that takes up much of the Book of Genesis. The parallels between how families worked back then and how they function now are practically identical. The settings and the cultural trappings may be different, but the human factors have remained unchanged. The functions and dysfunctions in families have been a constant since the first parents.

**List at least three ways you benefited from your particular family of origin.**

I realize that we're going into a sensitive subject here. Let me say at the outset that there is not going to be any parent bashing here. We're not looking at our past to find blame and let ourselves off the hook. The God-given capacity we use rightly or wrongly to assign blame is the very same capacity we use to own our responsibility, repent, and ask God for help. We want to understand our past so we see God's Word and His Spirit can demolish what seems set in stone.

The longer I'm a parent and the more decades I am away from my home of origin, the more grace I have for my parents and the more I recognize that they're people who are on a journey, too, to get free from some of the things with their parents. I just have faith to believe that the next generation will be better than my wife and I have been able to be. We just want to keep that going in the right direction. I know people have suffered in their home of origin. I know this is a sensitive subject.

**What are some of the ways you intend for your family to be different from the family in which you were raised?**

If we're going to think differently, we have to be willing to talk about the strongholds of family dysfunction. There are ways that you've been thinking for so long that you hardly even realize you're doing it, but it's the way your parents did or even what their parents did. We need to see those chains broken, so I'm going to try to wade in here where angels fear to tread, depending on God's wisdom and help every step of the way. I feel like Paul, writing to the Ephesians, when he said:

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*

## EPHESIANS 3:14-16

With the Spirit's power we will see strongholds demolished and be strengthened to be all that God intended as individuals and families.

We have already defined strongholds as fortified ways of thinking that are resistant to change, but how are we using the term *dysfunction*? It's an important word because it names the problem while it affirms a basic truth. The prefix *dys*, meaning ill or bad, is used in combination with *function* to indicate something legitimate has gotten twisted or gone sideways. The family was designed by God with certain crucial functions. Most mammals are born with a certain amount of survival equipment, like fur. We're born naked and totally dependent on our parents for our survival.

**If you've never done it, consider expressing gratitude to your parents for giving you life. You are using that very important gift right now.**

God also intended our homes to be the primary place where we would learn about Him. He gave the function of spiritual training to the family:

*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

## DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9

These are commands to parents, a job description that shapes their relationship with their children and the atmosphere that should be present in the home. God wants the conversations at meals and during travel, in the evening and in the morning to have as their subject matter Him and His ways.

**In what ways have you built into your home life occasions when God's Word and God's ways are discussed?**

One of the areas of frequent surprise for young marrieds is finding out that not every family does things the way your family did it. And "it" isn't just some little thing here or there—it's almost everything!

**What are some of the differences between the cultures of your family of origin and your spouse's? Which aspects (such as holiday traditions) have been challenges to harmonize?**

As we look at family dysfunctions these next two weeks, it will be important to remember that differences do not automatically mean dysfunctions.

Healthy couples learn to harmonize their family of origin cultures, choosing a mix of good practices from the past and actively creating a life that is unique to them. They also work at encouraging one another to see the dysfunctions from their past demolished by the work of God's Spirit in each other's lives.

**Pray for your spouse and your marriage this week, asking God to help you, practice grace in differences and to depend on God Spirit as you build a healthy family life together that honors Him.**

## DAY 2

### **GENERATIONAL SIN STRONGHOLDS**

Please take a moment and read [Genesis 26:1-11](#). There is a common dysfunction in families called generational sin. In order to understand Jacob better, we're going to look at Jacob's father Isaac.

[Genesis 26:1](#) tells us there was a famine much like a previous famine in Abraham's time (see [Gen. 12:10-20](#)). This presents a similar set of events that both the father (Abraham) and the son (Isaac) had to deal with. Abraham responded to the famine by traveling to Egypt; God intervened and told Isaac to stay in Gerar, a Philistine royal city located in modern Palestine, in all likelihood because he was about to follow in his father's sandal tracks. But God wanted to impress on Isaac that His blessings were tied to the land: "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you" ([Gen. 26:2](#)).

God then went on in verses 3-5 to reiterate His covenant with Abraham and his offspring, including the significant promise, "And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (v. 4). Of course that's prophetic of Abraham's descendant Jesus Christ, the Messiah through whom all of us have been blessed.

**How does God's covenant with Abraham and Isaac affect you? (If you're not sure, check out [Galatians 3:7-9](#) and [Romans 10:5-13](#) to better understand why.)**

In [Genesis 26:6-11](#), we can see a generational sin unfold right beside a generational obedience. First, there was generational obedience when Isaac married into his own extended family rather than choosing a wife from the pagan nations around him (see [Gen. 24](#)). Abraham preserved his family line by sending a servant to Haran to find a wife for his son. Eliezer returned with this woman (Rebekah) who was stunningly beautiful. Apparently lovely women ran in the clan. This also set up the circumstances for a generational sin.

"When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' for he feared to say, 'My wife,' thinking, 'lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,' because she was attractive in appearance" ([Gen. 26:7](#)). Notice that the motivation behind his answer was fear.

It wasn't long before Abimelech the king noticed that Isaac and Rebekah weren't exactly treating each other as brother-sister but as marrieds. If you have a study Bible, the term *laughing* in verse 8 is the Hebrew word that suggests an intimate relationship. A strong confrontation follows: "So Abimelech called Isaac and said, 'Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, "She is my sister"?' Isaac said to him, 'Because I thought, "Lest I die because of her"'" (v. 9).

Isaac's response is freaky, selfish, deceptive, and fearful. Isaac had a stronghold of fear. Here a pagan king showed greater sensitivity to the dangers of adultery than the child of God's promise. But God was also sovereignly stepping in to protect the heritage of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The underlying point here is that Isaac's lie was not invented in a vacuum. If we turn back to [Genesis 12](#) and [20](#) we will observe Isaac's father Abraham using this same tactic twice: once in Egypt (12:11-20) and again in Gerar (20:1-18). In the latter case, Abraham was actually dealing with Abimelech, the father of the leader who confronted Isaac. A pattern of sin in one generation can lead to generational sin in the next generations.

Abraham's (phlegmatic) primary issue was fear and trust. Isaac (phlegmatic) struggled with the exact same sin as his father. When the pressure was on and a threat was present, both Abraham and Isaac made decisions out of fear. Cover up! Hide! Lie about the truth!

By the time you see this in the third generation, the chains are strong in Jacob, who is not even phlegmatic. Lying has become so engrained that it is the default practice: deception to avoid pain, deceit to advance pleasure, or cheating for no reason. If we had asked Jacob, "Why do you lie so much?" he would likely have answered, "It's what I DO. It's what I ALWAYS do. It was in my family. My dad was a liar. My grandpa was a liar. We lie."

When we lie to avoid pressure on us, that may be generational sin. When we echo a sinful attitude or action that we witnessed in our parents or grandparents, we are propagating generational sin, though we may not immediately recognize it as part of our heritage. One of the eerie experiences in confronting sin in our lives and our families is that some generational sins may go back many generations. Each new generation either reinforces the stronghold or finally let's God demolish it. If a stronghold is left intact, it will likely be inherited by the next generation. The desire to destroy a family dysfunction is much more than the significant improvement of our own lives; it also involves what future generations will have to confront.

**Tomorrow we will review a number of common generational sins. As a result of the video or these last few pages, what practices are you now aware of that might be generational sins in your family? It may be time to ask God to demolish them.**

Let me add an important note about generational sin. [Deuteronomy 24:16](#) tells us, "Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin." That means no matter what your kids do, God will not punish you for their choices. And kids, (even adult kids), God won't punish you for your parents sins.

How does that square with generational sin? [Deuteronomy 5:9-10](#) also points out that God is involved in "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." Does God, then, withhold punishment from or visit iniquity upon one generation because of the actions of a previous generation? The answer is both! God does not judge us because of how your father, mother, grandfathers, or grandmothers struggled. Because of sin in your family's past, you can have certain temptations, inclinations, and vulnerabilities. If we're going to think differently and live in godly ways, we have to do some identifying and demolishing of those generational sin strongholds.

In this battle we find a statement of hope in the words of [1 John 4:4](#), "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." God's power is more than sufficient for this battle. But if we're going to think differently, then we're going to be aware and trust God.

### DAY 3

#### A CATALOG OF GENERATIONAL SINS

Before we look at five common generational sins, let me remind you of a crucial dynamic that was part of Abraham's experience and is part of yours. [Genesis 20:1-2](#) sets up the scene: "From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.' And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah." He lied about his wife Sarah to Abimelech, but the tactic had unintended consequences. Abraham was left alive, but he suddenly lost his wife. Abimelech reasonably concluded, "If she's not your wife, I'll make her one of mine!"

The next verse begins with the words, "But God" (v. 3). There was another interested party involved in Abraham's life. God's plan to create a people for Himself was in play. The heritage of Jesus Christ was at risk. And God made a move. The same is true of your life. How many things in our lives hinge on those two words: "But God"?

The testimony of every believer is some form of this statement: *I was thinking, planning, going \_\_\_\_\_, but God intervened. God dropped a boulder of reality on my false world and showed me my condition. When God breaks into our lives, that's grace right there.*

**How does the phrase "But God" fit in describing your experience in recognizing that you need a savior?**

**When recently has God sovereignly interrupted your plans or actions to get you back on track with His plans?**

What are some of the strongholds that can be passed on from one generation to another? Here are some generational stronghold categories:

### **SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Multiple generations in a family can be hounded by certain false escapes. They turn to alcohol; they don't turn to God. They turn to smoking pot and other kinds of medications that inebriate the ability to feel pain. And because it blocks the pain, it blocks the God-given prod to get us to a better place.

**Take a mental survey of your medicine cabinet and hiding places. What substances could serve or are serving as a ready alternative to seeking God's help for challenges in life?**

**Are there known abuses from previous generations that you have avoided by substituting other abuses? (One generation's struggle with alcohol can easily show up in the next generation as some other kind of abuse.)**

### **MATERIALISM**

Maybe you grew up in a family where everything was about the next thing. Does this sound familiar? "We're going to get one of these. We're going to buy, own it, polish it, and enjoy it. This is our life! Our stuff! You better not TOUCH my boat! WHO SCRATCHED MY BOAT?!"

If you grew up with, "My stuff! My stuff! My stuff!," that can become a real stronghold for people. As I often say, it's not wrong to have a thing, but if that thing has you, that's a threat to God. And it will be taken out. It's much better to have that stronghold broken.

**How do you tell the difference between something you own and something that owns you?**

**Ask God to show you possessions that have become idols in your life.**

### **GLUTTONY AND OTHER FOOD DISORDERS**

Maybe you grew up in a home where the amount of food that was served at the table was three times what was needed, and you had someone whose identity was tied up in seeing you enjoy food. So everyone in your family has battled obesity because food had a place that it wasn't supposed to have. Perhaps bulimia has been a byproduct for some. Food can indicate a stronghold.

**How are the current eating habits in your family a reflection and/or resistance to the food traditions in previous generations?**

## LUST

Pornography and other sexual perversions, even when apparently kept hidden, show up in succeeding generations. Sadly, sexual abusers may have grown up the children of sexual abusers. These strongholds require God's intervention in a big way.

**The rampant exposure to porn on the Internet may be making you the generation that initiates or escalates this destructive pattern. How do you maintain accountability over the sexual area of your life?**

## SELFISHNESS

Do you find yourself echoing these thoughts you've heard all your life? "We only do what's best for us. Just the people at this house. We don't serve anyone. We don't give ourselves to anyone." Selfishness can become a generational sin and stronghold.

**What's the difference between healthy family solidarity and family selfishness?**

**When would choosing to do without as a family actually be a beneficial practice?**

This isn't an easy list to apply personally. Some of these items may hit close to home, but we need to speak truth to one another in love if we are destroying the strongholds in family dysfunction.

**Pray about generational sins in your family. Do some journaling about your family history. If your parents/grandparents are living, gently ask them about patterns you suspect. Lift up your parents and grandparents in prayer.**

We ended yesterday with words of hope about generational sins. Here are some more. Back to [Deuteronomy 5:9-10](#) where God is warning He is "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (v. 9). This is where you stop and say, "But I don't hate God!" I'm glad to hear that because God immediately goes on to say, "but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (v. 10).

God draws near to those who want to follow and obey Him. He is pleased with those who honor Him. He stands with those who want to break the chains of generational sins in their family.

### **Make this your prayer:**

*Lord, I want to do everything I can as long I'm drawing breath to make sure I get victory over some things so that my kids don't struggle with the things that I struggle with, and so my grandkids—when I'm off of this earth—are not battling things that I wouldn't let God get me victory over. Help me, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## DAY 4

### **STRONGHOLDS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

In discussing our dispositions last week, there were two broad categories we didn't mention that affect all the temperaments. Some of us are extroverts and some of us are introverts. Extroverts tend to be others-oriented; introverts tend to be the opposite, inner-oriented. Extroverts tend toward fight; introverts tend toward flight.



Because we are looking at family of origin issues, it's often helpful to identify the general characteristics of our home life. Some of us grew up in a "fight" home with extroverted parents, others in a "flight" home with introverted parents, but the reality is that many of us probably grew up in a home with one of each. We had a mother or a father who would fight it out while the opposite spouse was always trying to smooth things over, hope for the best, or deal with it later. How conflict was dealt with can become a massive stronghold in the lives of God's people. We want that destroyed.

**Describe your childhood home life using the fight/flight or shouting/silence language to identify the level of introverted and extroverted tendencies from your parents.**

Read [Genesis 26:12-22](#). Isaac was not living where God wanted him to live; he was living in Gerar with the Philistine nation. The Philistines became a problem for Israel up through the life of David and beyond, but God's blessing on Isaac's life resulted in him becoming very wealthy and provoking the envy of the Philistines. They expressed this envy by filling in wells that Abraham had dug and claiming the new wells Isaac's servants dug. These hostile actions endangered Isaac's flocks.

**Imagine if your dad had dug all of these wells in the land that God gave him. You're the bigger and more powerful person, but your enemies who have already told you that they're afraid of you come and start filling in your wells. How would you respond?**

Well, this is what Isaac did. "So Isaac departed from there" (v. 17). Isaac's flight response caused him to say, "You want me to leave? I'll leave. Where do you want me to go? Tell me where you want me to go and I'll go there." Three different wells were re-dug by Isaac's men before the quarreling ran its course. At that point, Isaac had moved to Beersheba (v. 23) which place him back in the promised land.

What conclusions might we draw from Isaac's actions? The point here isn't that Isaac was wrong in every instance to avoid the conflict, rather that Isaac's wrongness is in the fact that avoidance is all he did. He just ran from conflict. His stronghold was based in fear. Phlegmatics fear. And so Isaac made his decisions based upon that stronghold.

Sometimes flight is the right thing, but sometimes engagement and even a fight is right. Do we have to have some conflict? Let's have it, but let's have it in a healthy way. Depending on the circumstances, either response should be on the table.

**How does your temperament tend to respond to conflict (especially if you are not a phlegmatic)?**

**Under pressure, do you believe it's better to have a consistent response or to have a consistent pattern of considering the circumstances before responding? Why?**

If you want to know what God thinks about Isaac's motivation, note what God told him in [Genesis 26:24](#), "And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not.'" This is God's Word to all of us. [Second Timothy 1:7](#) reminds us that "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." God doesn't want His children living in fear, yet fear is a huge stronghold for many.

My point here is whatever is your way of dealing with conflict, the stronghold of fear is the "one-size-fits-all" approach to conflict resolution. The problem is that we always want to do what we do naturally and easily. Consistency in conflict resolution is no more a wise tactic than assuming that in a conflict that you're always right. Several factors determine the wise way to respond in a conflict situation:

Second, choosing on his own made it highly likely that Esau would make a bad decision. The Hittites were renowned pagan troublemakers. Esau brought not one but two godless women into the family. Now he wasn't emulating his father but his grandfather Abraham who had multiple wives.

So Esau married these two women. That word *bitter* in [Genesis 26:35](#) literally means grief of mind. These two women were such a grief to Isaac's family that they were tormented by the misery caused by Esau's godless wives. If you think it went away quickly, look at [Genesis 27:46](#) where Rebekah says to Isaac: "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

Rebekah had a stronghold of bitterness to deal with. Don't let your kids take the place of God in your life. Is your life all about your unmarried kids? We can't control their choices anyway! Raising kids isn't like baking cookies. There is no recipe. I've seen godly parents heartbroken by evil choices of rebellious children. I've seen kids brought up in horrific homes that broke through those barriers to serve God.

People make their choices. You can't do anything to guarantee your kids will follow the Lord. You can do some things to guarantee that they won't, and you never want to elevate your kids to the level of really becoming a stronghold in your life.

**Many choices can't be reversed. Bad decisions can't be undone. But you don't have to continue making poor choices. Based on what you've learned so far, what needs to change in your decision-making process?**

**As you end this week's studies, take a few minutes to pray for the rest of your small group. Ask God to work powerfully in their lives to demolish strongholds.**