

# How To Be Set Free

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Corinthians 10:1-5  
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Tonight I want to encourage you to open to 2 Corinthians 10 and as you're doing so, tonight is one of those nights where I can get away with a good football story because there's a little football game taking place known as the Super Bowl. Most people would be surprised to find out the first few Super Bowls were not even sold out. They didn't even know if something like that would even catch on and over time it has become one of the most viewed, one of the most, shall we say, celebrated sporting events of the year not just here in America but worldwide, and the reason I want to allude to a Super Bowl story is one of the teams that is playing this evening, the team we know as the Kansas City Chiefs has not been in the Super Bowl for 50 years, closely followed by my Dallas Cowboys. But nonetheless, it's been 50 years that they haven't been in a Super Bowl and they're there tonight.

I joke about the Dallas Cowboys but a lot of people don't know the history of the franchise that is playing tonight that is actually very pertinent to the passage of Scripture we're about to study. The Kansas City Chiefs were not always located in Kansas City. They used to be a team known as the Dallas Texans. They were there back in the 1950s. Their owner was a man by the name of Lamar Hunt who is just a legend in the sport's world, an American businessman. Back in the '70s and '80s, he was a part of kind of the silver rush of those days from the commodities market and such. But Lamar Hunt established the Dallas Texans and their home games were played at what you and I know as the Cotton Bowl. That's where they played their home games, and let's just say that it was not a very good business venture. Things weren't going necessarily well and then in 1960, that's right, 60 years ago, there was another little team that was started known as the Dallas Cowboys. So you had the Texans, you had the Cowboys and they played their respective home games on alternate weekends, and at the end of the season they would play against each other, kind of as one last home game. A couple of years into that rivalry, Lamar Hunt was determined that the city known as Dallas, Texas would never be a football city and so he declared that when they played that year, the winning team could move away. You laugh because the Dallas Texans left and it's been 50 years since they've been in the Super Bowl. The Cowboys stayed and they played in many of them. Today Dallas is somewhat synonymous with football and yet 60 years ago even some of the brightest and the smartest minds thought there was no way that this area of the world would be a football town.

Why is that pertinent? Because the issue we're gonna deal with tonight is something that we all long for, something we all desire even as believers in Jesus Christ, something we've all pondered, yet I often wonder if we're not a whole lot like Lamar Hunt and the Kansas City Chiefs, that we're so determined of what we think it should look like, we often miss out on what it could look like and the question, or shall I say the statement is how to be set free? How can we as believers, how can we as Christians, how can we be set free from the bondage and the struggle of sin? How can we be set free from the temptations and the struggles of life? How can we walk in freedom rather than being shackled in bondage?

Now if you've ever met a believer who says, "Oh, I've never been shackled. I've never been in bondage." Either A, they're lying, or B, they're not a believer because as a believer in Jesus Christ, though we may be saved, though we may be sealed and seated in the heavenlies, we then become the object and the target of the enemy. The enemy desires to place us in bondage so that we cannot live in the freedom and the life that Christ has borne and bought for us.

2 Corinthians 10, it says,

1 Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: 2 But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Now I want you to think about those words we just read. It does not state that there's the possibility of being in a warfare. It does not say that on occasions we may find ourselves in spiritual conflict. It is a given that you and I are in the midst of a battle.

You know, as you read through the New Testament, a concept that we've labeled spiritual warfare, those times where we struggle against the wiles of the enemy, those times that we wield the sword of the Spirit, what's interesting is all those passages about spiritual warfare, none of them are addressed to the carnal, lost, heathen world. None of them. You say, "Why is that?" Because the lost world's not in a war. They're not in a battle. They've already been taken captive, they're already entrenched with the enemy. It's those of us who – listen – have escaped the wiles of the enemy through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are the ones who are at stake. We are the ones that are battled for. We are the ones that are at war. It is an absolute given. It says we do not war after the flesh and the weapons of our warfare.

Interesting and throughout time and I appreciate, John, all the background and history of the songs and spiritual songs and hymns that we've sung, that many many years ago we used to sing a lot of songs with warfare themes in them and somewhat that has subsided in recent days. I'm not declaring that our hymnology is necessarily an absolute reflection of our theology but I do wonder if part of the reason that we find so many believers today in bondage and shackled in the struggles of the spiritual world is because maybe we don't declare those truths enough, and not just in Bible study but in song.

So as we kind of walk through this passage, I just want to address three simple concepts that hopefully will break down to hopefully empower us to walk out of here in a few moments prepared for victory and freedom versus much the opposite.

The first is the who, and we know this is written to believers because it's written to the saints who are at Corinth but I want to get more specific than that. Who? Who is it, or shall I say who are we? Now that sounds like a rudimentary question and many of you tonight may say, "Well, that sounds overly simplistic." Can I give you a heads-up for next week? In the next chapter, chapter 11, the Apostle Paul says he struggles, he marvels that they have removed themselves from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. You know, I want to declare or I want to kind of spend a little time on who you and I are. You say, "Well, don't you get up in the morning and look at the mirror?" Yeah, but I want to dig down a little bit deeper than that because it says at the very last of verse 2, walking according to the flesh but though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. Well, when the Bible speaks of the flesh, just take it on my word that it's never a good thing. Never. Never does the Scriptures celebrate the flesh. In fact, in Romans 7 the Apostle Paul says that it's in his flesh is no good thing. He then goes on to say that everything that he's ever done that he's ever messed up in, is because it was entrenched and it was rooted in his flesh.

Now one of the verses that I think gives a lot of insight to this is 1 Thessalonians 5:23, the very end of the very first chronological letter the Apostle Paul gives us. He makes this interesting statement, he says, "I pray that your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." I don't find it ironic, in fact, I find it providential that you and I are described as one entity but in "three parts." Hm, interesting since we were born in his image initially. It only makes sense that there is one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that you and I are a single human being possessing of a spirit, a soul and a body. According to Ephesians 2, when you were lost, you were walking according to the spirit of disobedience, but now as a believer in Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 6 says you are the temple, you are the tabernacle of the Holy Ghost. You and I upon our salvation have received a new life. You and I have received a new spirit. The Spirit of God now dwells in us versus the spirit of disobedience. Our soul rather than being destined for hell is destined for heaven. But one day according to 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians 4, one day the Lord is gonna descend and with a great shout those who are dead in Christ, those who are alive in Christ are gonna meet together in the air and it says that those of us who are alive, we shall be transformed, that which is mortal shall put on immortality. In other words, these earthly confined bodies will receive a new body.

How many times have we talked and we've studied that as a believer in Jesus Christ one day you and I will receive new bodies? Well, if that's the case, it's because we've got some messed up old bodies that we're currently residing in, and he says here that we walk according to the flesh. In other words, we're still stuck in this flesh. Now I want to make a statement, I know I've said this many times particularly on Wednesday night: you are not a soul infused body, you are a soul that happens to be covered by a body. In other words, who you are primarily is not what any of us can see.

You know, one day the Bible says that when we're walking in the new heaven and the new earth, not only do we have a new body, it says you're gonna have a new name. I'm gonna have a new name. All of that we know on the outside will vanish away, we'll be transformed, transfigured and eventually become new, but until then we're much like the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 when he says, "I die daily." Our bodies are eroding on a daily basis. I know we focused on that this morning, here's the problem: even though we're saved, even though we're born again, even though we're a child of God, we still have a tendency to struggle with the flesh.

You know, in the book of Romans 8 which, by the way, and I'm not trying to be sarcastic, follows chapter 7 and the reason that's important is in chapter 7 the Apostle Paul kind of makes us all take a big deep breath. I don't know about you, but when I hear of the Apostle Paul, I think of greatness. I mean, if we were to put it in sports terms, it is Super Bowl Sunday, he would be the reigning consistent MVP, would he not? I mean, there would be him and everybody else. And yet the Apostle Paul oftentimes we think he was on such a pedestal he never did wrong, never spoke ill, never made a mistake, and yet in chapter 7 of the book of Romans do you know what he confesses? He says, "Everything that I want to do, I don't do. Everything I wish I didn't do, I do." And he begins to confess that he's got flesh, you've got flesh, and he struggles with his flesh, and we struggle with our flesh.

That's why chapter 8 of Romans is so important because when you get to verse 1 it says, "Therefore," by the way, anytime you see the word "therefore" in the Bible it's a good sign. "Therefore there is no condemnation," there is no hell, there is no eternal punishment, "there is no condemnation to those of us who are in Christ Jesus," I want you to hear the next statement, "who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Now our warfare is in the flesh but we are to not walk in the flesh. In other words, we're not to celebrate the flesh, we're not to desire the things of the flesh, but each and every day we battle the flesh. In fact, in Romans 8:8 it says, "Those that are in the flesh cannot please God." Now let's look at that from a truly significant standpoint. That means if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, you could do all the charity work in the world, you can give away all of your finances and you're still not gonna please God. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Let me kind of extrapolate from that as a believer. Believers who walk according to the flesh will not please God. In other words, there is this conflict that is a part of our regular daily lives. When you and I walk throughout our lives, we have the Spirit of God dwelling within us, we have a soul that is destined to the heavenlies but we've got this messed up stuff known as flesh that we're still wrapped up

in, and you and I are in a battle. We've got two choices: we can either listen to the indwelling guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, or we can listen to our flesh.

You know, it's interesting here in verse 3 it says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." Even though we're stuck with it, even though we're still wrapped up in it, even though we're still covered in it, we do not war after it. In other words, we should no longer desire it. There's many analogies and proverbs through the years, you've heard them in a variety of forms, where if you have two competing entities, which one will win and it's simply the one that you feed. There's a lot of different analogies and parables and proverbs and such, and the same goes for you and I. We talk about the flesh and we talk about the spirit, the question is which one's gonna win? Which one do you feed? If you feed the flesh, the flesh is gonna grow. If you feed the spirit, the spirit will increase in our lives. That is why, and I know you expect this from your pastor, but that is why we talk about spending daily time with the Lord because I don't know about you but I like to feed my flesh. Now I'm speaking of breakfast, lunch, dinner and several snacks in between. I'm not gonna go without feeding my flesh. You know that's why fasting is so hard, right? And I know we pick on Baptists because of the fact, fasting is hard because you have to say no to the flesh.

By the way, tonight is not about fasting per se but one of the interesting things about fasting in the Scripture is that it comprised the majority of your day to prepare the meals to be consumed and fasting wasn't just, "I'm not gonna consume calories," it's, "I'm not gonna spend hours and hours and hours in preparation of that which only benefits my flesh." I don't want to be dogmatic about this but today's fasting may not just be about calories, it may be about screen time, folks. Oftentimes our flesh is fed more by technology than it is by calories and that goes to the same, what are we feeding, the flesh or the spirit?

It says though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. Essentially what it's saying there is we're still stuck with this stuff but we shouldn't desire it in our life. We get to verse 4 and we get the how. So how do we focus on the Spirit? How do we reject the flesh in our life? It says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." In other words, the war that we engage in, the means by which we do it, the how of this, they're not carnal. You can't think about flesh and blood. That's why Ephesians 6 says the warfare that we're engaged in is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and rulers of darkness. In other words, the warfare is not that which can be touched, heard or seen as much as it is in the spiritual realm. Our weapons are not carnal, they are spiritual.

Now when you hear about weaponry in spiritual warfare, we naturally and rightfully gravitate toward Ephesians 6 where it tells us as soldiers to bear the armor of God. Now if you're gonna engage in a battle, if I'm gonna engage in a battle, we want to make sure that we're wearing the proper equipment not only to win the battle but also to be safe. There's a famous story obviously, 1 Samuel 17, where who we know as King David, he wasn't a king yet, he was shepherd boy David, goes and he brings his brothers, one of my favorite statements in the Bible, he brings them cheeses. I just like the fact the Bible says

he brings them cheeses. He brings cheese to his brothers, they get in a bantering battle about who's gonna take out Goliath. He finally says, "Well, is there not a cause?" And he goes forth to fighting. Remember what Saul did? Saul, the king, said, "Well, if you're gonna go fight Goliath, you need my armor." Remember the problem with the armor? It's too big. It's too heavy. Hadn't been tested. How did David win that battle? With a slingshot and a bunch of rocks. And what did he say to Goliath? Did he say to Goliath, "I come as the greatest slingshot in the Middle East"? Remember what he said? "I come to you in the name of the Lord God." In other words, it was a spiritual expression, not a carnal one.

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. Back to Ephesians 6, the armor of God. Oftentimes we can recite it and I will do so tonight, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, our feet being shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Therein when we go into battle, we are prepared. Those of you who are astute of Scripture will note that I actually left out one very significant descriptive phrase. Allow me to recite the armor again in its proper manner. The belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation, shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Do you realize that the only offensive weapon you've got is the Bible? Everything else is defensive.

So if we're going to win a battle, now we could speak in strict military terms, we could speak in football terms, the battle of the gridiron that's taking place in games such as tonight, anytime that you and I are gonna engage in a battle, you're going to put up a defense, and you're going to put up on offense, are you not? Interesting that the armor of God that everything except the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, they're all defensive. The belt of truth is defensive. The shield of faith is defensive. The breastplate of righteousness is defensive. The helmet of salvation is defensive. In other words, the warfare that you and I are engaged in every day, if we desire freedom in our life, it won't come by being better, trying harder or desiring more. The only weapon you've got is the word of God. Let me remind you, when Jesus Christ was in the wilderness 40 days and 40 nights and Satan tempted him, what was his response? "It is written," was his response. Every single time he battled and he won with the word of God.

Now why is that important? Because if we talk about being set free, in our context in our culture, we think of classes, we think of seminars, we think of routines, we think of processes, and yet according to the word of God, freedom is by knowing and applying the word of God. It doesn't cost us anything, folks, except our own time, energy and you're gonna have to battle the flesh to make it a priority.

So what will happen? If you and I truly desire freedom and truly make the word of God a priority in our life to set us free in life, verse 4 and 5 says that it will pull down strongholds, cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Quickly, what does that mean? 1. You will be released from strongholds. Now again, this is Super Bowl Sunday so allow me to continue the analogies. It's been said if you're a

football fan they can call holding on every play. When the offensive linemen are trying to prevent the defensive linemen from coming in or whoever is penetrating toward the quarterback or the running back, they're allowed to utilize their body but they cannot hold them. A stronghold is exactly that. You are desiring to move, you're desiring to go forward, you're desiring to make progress and you cannot do so because something is holding you back. That could be a temptation. That could be a struggle. That could be an addiction. That could be a thought. That could be a doubt. That could be anything in your life that I can't go forward because whatever it is has got a hold of me and much like a big old offensive lineman that won't let you through, is keeping you from the desired goal. What does it say here? Pulling down strongholds. It means that that which is holding us is pulled off of us; that which is grabbing us is removed from us. We are released from those strongholds. If there's some stuff in your life that's got a hold of you and you can't seem to make any progress, you can go to all the classes, you can go to all the seminars, you can listen to all of the lectures you want but it's the word of God that is our weapon, that when utilized as Jesus Christ said, then those strongholds can come tearing down.

What's the next thing that we remove? The high thing and imaginations that exalt itself against the knowledge of God. Put in everyday practical terms, anybody struggle with putting anything above the Lord in your life? If you say no, you lied. We do. We all do. We struggle and, by the way, those can be good things but oftentimes we allow the high things, and if you go into the Old Testament there were altars that were put up, it was called the high places and as you walked through and, by the way, can I give a little bit of a commercial? The next month or so is gonna be a challenge to us in the Bible reading program. We're going to be in 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles. Our flesh is gonna say, "I'll see you on the other side." But there is a whole lot to be learned in there and over and over and over particularly in the Chronicles, you know what you're gonna see? You're gonna see kings who allowed the high places to be built and kings that tore them down, and it made all the difference in the world that those imaginations, because they're imaginary gods, cannot be present in our life.

Not only can we be released from the strongholds, the high places, the imaginations, the things that take our thoughts and our lives into captivity can be removed from our lives. I want you to picture it like you're gonna read in Kings and Chronicles. They literally marched up the hill, they took that which has been built and they just removed it. The Lord can remove those things from our lives and finally we can be refreshed. I love what it says in verse 5, "that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity most of our thoughts to the obedience of Christ." Just making sure you're reading, "every thought." You know, according to Romans 12:2, the battlefield is the mind and I'm gonna go ahead that confession is good for the soul and I think I've walked with the Lord long enough to be able to speak to as I continue to walk with him, my battle isn't as much with my eyes, my ears, my hands and my feet as it is my mind. I can allow the enemy to conjure up more between my ears than he ever tempts me to do with my hands. Why? Because I don't know about you, but my mind goes a-racing and I can think of all kinds of things and, you know, there's an old adage that man's greatest fears are rarely ever half-realized. Oftentimes it's what happens between my ears and the Bible

says in Romans 12, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

What does it say? "Taking every thought to the obedience of Christ." Do you know what your mind thinks upon? That which you put in it. You know, decades ago when the personal computer became personal, in other words when it went from being these huge massive supercomputers in academic labs of institutions to actually sitting on our desk and, by the way, now they sit in our pockets, there was a phrase that was implemented and those of you that have any kind of technology background will be familiar with it, it was gigo or g-i-g-o, if you put garbage in, you're gonna get garbage out. In other words, when you're programming a computer, it's just a computer, it's what you put in will determine what you get out. Our minds, our thoughts, the high things in life, the strongholds of life, at the end of the day the question we have to ask ourselves is which are we feeding the most? If you feed the flesh with the things of the flesh, you're gonna struggle with the things of the flesh. If you feed the Spirit of God with the word of God, then freedom can take place.

Let me return to the question as we close, how to be set free. It sounds so simple that most of us will never get it. Take the sword of God, the word of God, apply it to our life, live it in our life, and all the imaginations and the thoughts will come captive to him. Do you know what it cost us? It cost us saying no to the flesh and that may be the hardest thing to say no to.