

CHAPTER SEVEN

Surrendering Your
STRONGHOLDS

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

—2 TIMOTHY 1:7 (NLT)

I HAD BEEN TAKING baby steps on my journey to healing. Little by little, God had spoken powerful Truths into my life, but I still lived with the practical realities of being afraid. There were nights I chose to stay alone, and I was proud of that accomplishment. Most of the time, I still called a friend. Because we had lived in Dallas for over ten years, we had a close-knit circle of friends who generously opened their homes to my children and me when Monty traveled. My kids saw it as a slumber party and received lots of love and attention. However, it was a source of constant stress for me.

When we moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1998, I left behind friends who were familiar with my circumstances, friends I trusted completely. Our move thrust me into unfamiliar surroundings. Being a stranger in a new city returned me to a place of extreme vulnerability. Knowing there was no one to call if I needed

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anything exacerbated my fears. This created a strain on our family and in our marriage. For eleven years, Monty had loved me through all of my issues, fears, and emotions. Without the network of friends to support us, the burden fell entirely on him. When he traveled, I did not sleep. Lack of sleep led to exhaustion. Exhaustion led to moodiness. I soon began to resent my husband for bringing me to this city so far from home.

I did have one friend in Charlotte, my college roommate Karen, who knew about my past and my daily struggles. She understood my fears. There were several nights when she opened her home to Lauren, Bo, and me when Monty traveled, but she had a husband and three children of her own. I could not impose upon her family indefinitely. Something had to give.

About six months after we moved to Charlotte, Karen invited me to her Bible study. It was my first true Bible study. I had participated in small group studies before, but this was my first time studying a specific book of the Bible from beginning to end. It was also my first time sitting under a Bible teacher. The thought of joining this study intimidated me, but I agreed because I knew it would allow me more time with Karen.

Our teacher, Jan Harrison, possessed incredible Bible knowledge. I had never met anyone who loved and believed in the power of God's Word as much as she did. Her passion was infectious. I found myself writing fast and furiously to record every word she spoke. Week after week I would go home, study my notes, and look up every Scripture she referenced.

Eventually we delved into the topic of *strongholds*. I was not familiar with this word. Jan defined a stronghold as any deeply rooted sin in your life that prevents you from growing in your relationship with God. She listed specific strongholds like bitterness, anger, pride, addiction, pornography, and fear. *Fear?* When she said the word, a shiver ran down my spine. Fear. I was afraid. In fact, fear controlled my life. *Could this be my stronghold?* I went home that night and reread the lesson and my notes, absorbing every word. I

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could hardly wait until we met again. I had so many questions.

As part of this series of lessons, Jan spent time discussing Satan. I knew who he was; I had learned about him in Sunday school as a child. Jan taught powerful biblical Truths about Satan that I had never heard before. I am going to spend significant time sharing what I learned because it has had a profound influence on my faith.

Who is Satan? God originally named him Lucifer, the star of the morning. God created him and all angels to serve and glorify God. Scripture tells us that in his original created state, Lucifer was the most brilliant and beautiful of all God's created beings in heaven. Ezekiel 28:12–15, 17 (NLT) describes him: "You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and exquisite in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Your clothing was adorned with every precious stone . . . all beautifully crafted for you and set in the finest gold. They were given to you on the day you were created. I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God. . . . You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you. . . . Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor."

Over time, Lucifer's heart filled with pride. He was no longer content to worship and glorify God. He plotted to usurp God's throne. Lucifer wanted what belonged to God alone . . . all power and all authority on heaven and on earth. He orchestrated a rebellion in heaven, and as many as one-third of God's angels joined Lucifer in this battle. Scripture tells us that in response to Lucifer's actions, God cast him and his rebel angels out of heaven. 2 Peter 2:4 (NLT) says, "For God did not spare even the angels who sinned. He threw them into hell, in gloomy pits of darkness, where they are being held until the day of judgment."

Lucifer became Satan, also known by many as the Devil. Satan and his cohorts are committed to the destruction of all that is God's and of all that is good. He lives to lead God's people astray, to hold them captive, and to keep them in places of pain and despair. He

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has many methods, but his *modus operandi* is deception, to discredit and contradict the Word of God. John 8:44 (NLT) says that Satan “was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

*What was Eve's
first mistake?
She entered into a
dialogue with Satan.*

I was a little overwhelmed and frightened by what Jan was teaching. Moreover, I wondered what it had to do with me. As if she could read my mind, our next lesson focused on the story of Adam and Eve. Scripture says that God created one man and one woman. He placed them in the beautiful garden of Eden. God created them in His image, and He deeply loved them. As created, Adam and Eve were pure and morally innocent. They did not lack for anything physically, spiritually, or emotionally. They reigned over the garden with complete freedom and only one restriction: God commanded them not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

One day as Eve was standing near the forbidden tree, Satan appeared to her in the form of a serpent. He asked her, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?” (Genesis 3:1 NLT). Satan twisted God’s words for his own purposes. He knew God had told them not to eat of only *one* tree in the garden, yet he asked Eve if God told her she could not eat from *any* tree in the garden. Eve answered, “Of course we may eat from the trees in the garden. . . . It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die’” (Genesis 3:2 NLT). While completing my homework on this particular lesson, I did not even notice the difference in Eve’s words from God’s original commandment. However, Jan pointed out that God did not say that Eve could not *touch* the fruit, only that she could not *eat* the fruit.

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What was Eve's first mistake? She engaged in a dialogue with Satan. His leading question opened the door that caused her to misinterpret God's words to her. You see, Eve heard God's words with her ears, but she did not receive them into her heart.

Listen to the crafty Serpent's reply: "You won't die! . . . God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5 NLT). God explicitly warned Adam and Eve that if they ate from the tree, they would die. Satan contradicted God. He cleverly convinced Eve that she would not die.

Satan denied the very truth God had given Adam and Eve. He suggested that it would be good to eat the fruit because in eating it, Eve would become "like God." He tempted her with power, prestige, and position. He led her to believe that God was withholding something from her, something more desirable than what she already had. As a result, Eve began to trust her evaluation of right and wrong, rather than allowing God's words to define right and wrong.

Eve had a choice: Believe God's Word or Satan's word. The choice seems obvious; she had so much to lose. However, Eve chose to believe the lies of the Serpent. She not only ate the forbidden fruit but also offered it to her husband, who ate it as well. The moment Adam and Eve took the fruit and bit into it, they lost everything. They damaged God's provision, His protection, and their perfect union with Him.

As Jan continued to share Eve's story with our group, I struggled to understand how it related to my life. Finally, Jan got to the point of her lesson. She explained that Adam and Eve are not fictional characters. They were flesh and blood, and the consequences of their actions were real. When Eve chose to partake of the fruit, sin entered the world. Satan gained a foothold on earth, and he continues his assault to this day. He is relentless in his attacks on God's children, using shame, guilt, lack of forgiveness, and fear to separate them from their Creator.

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My thoughts wandered from the lesson when I heard the word *fear* again. *Stronghold. Sin.* God was speaking directly to me. I had come to recognize His hand at work in my life by now. God had led me to this study to bring me face-to-face with my fear. However, I was frightened. I remembered how many years I struggled with a lack of forgiveness and how difficult those years were. With God's help I had won that battle; however, I did not believe that I had the strength to do it all over again in relation to fear.

As my mind returned to Bible study, Jan had begun teaching on *spiritual warfare*. She took us to Ephesians 6:12—"For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (NLT). She explained that there is an invisible spiritual conflict waging around us, an eternal battle between the visible world and the invisible world. She defined it as the battle between the forces of good and evil, light and dark. Her teaching seemed like fantasy, better suited for the movies or my son's PlayStation games than Bible study. She relayed that every person on earth is engaged in this war, even me. I left my lesson that day overwhelmed and afraid. I did not know what to do with all the questions and confusion swimming around in my brain.

As soon as I got home, I put Bo down for a nap and sat quietly with God. I wept and prayed and wept and prayed. I was so tired of being afraid. I had lived with my fear for over a decade! It controlled my life, and I knew it was keeping me from a deeper, richer walk with God. As I closed my prayer, instead of asking God to take away my fear as I had for the last ten years, I asked Him to help me overcome it. It was a very different prayer. Taking away my fear meant asking God to do the work for me, whereas overcoming my fear meant that I had some work to do as well. I knew that God was not going to *take* my fear from me. He was calling me to be an active participant in the work He was about to do in my life.

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With renewed commitment, I sat at my dining room table to study. I opened my Bible, asking God for wisdom to understand what He would teach me regarding fear and spiritual warfare. He had never failed me when I prayed to hear His voice. Sometimes it was slow in coming or I was slow in receiving, but He was faithful. As I began my search, I landed on Jeremiah 29:13–14—“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity.” Matthew 7:7–8 says, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” God is so gracious! These verses assured me that He was with me, listening, and ready to go to work.

I eagerly dug into His Word for the answers I longed to hear. God took me back to the passage I memorized the first night I stayed alone in Dallas: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT). *The Amplified Bible* says God has given us a spirit of a “calm and a well-balanced mind.” I love those words, *calm* and *well-balanced mind*. This time I approached the verse in an entirely different manner. I did not just “read and recite” the words. I broke it down, studying and meditating on each phrase. As I did, questions came to my mind. *Spirit of fear. What is that? From where does it come?*

I knew who the Holy Spirit was. As a child, I learned that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Later in my teen years, I learned that when a person gives her life to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of her. Jesus told His disciples this very Truth the night before He was to die on the cross: “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the

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Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). *Counselor* is another name for the Holy Spirit. Earlier in John, Jesus explained, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:16–18). I believed this, but I longed to understand how it happens.

Scripture makes it very clear that the moment we confess our sin and accept Christ as our Savior, God seals our hearts with His Spirit. Paul writes, “And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him” (Ephesians 1:13–14 NLT). We belong to Him.

The passage brought to mind another symbol of belonging that is extremely important to me—my wedding ring. When I put that ring on my finger, it marked me forever as Monty’s wife. According to God’s Word, the two of us became one. He sealed our marriage with His Spirit and His love, and my ring is a symbol of that covenant between God and us . . . for eternity.

What I am about to share with you is one of the most important truths I will write about in this book. I pray that you will understand the immense significance of the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we move through this chapter, you will see that His Holy Spirit is the One who empowered me to take my greatest step forward.

My friend, you may be having the same thoughts I initially had. God’s coming and living inside a person seems far-fetched. Yet the Bible is unequivocal. Scripture clearly teaches that the moment you receive Christ as your Savior, God seals you with His Spirit. You immediately receive the fullness of His Spirit: not just part of God, but all of Him. The power of God, the same power

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that hung the stars, lined the planets in perfect order, transformed a void in space into a beautiful garden, and raised Christ from the dead comes to dwell within you.

I know it may be hard to believe, but it is TRUTH! *All* of God is in *all* of you *all* of the time. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes you like a “well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (Isaiah 58:11). No more striving. You work in the strength and power of the God of the universe. Through that power, Scripture promises that God is able to “do immeasurably more than all [you] ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20). God will do even more for you than you would dare to ask for yourself. He desires to give beyond your greatest prayers, thoughts, or hopes! This power is absolutely necessary to resist the guiles of the Devil.

Scripture warns that we have a great Enemy in the person of Satan. He is not a myth or product of human imagination. As I shared earlier, he exists and he is the fiercest enemy of God’s people. Peter compares Satan to a roaring lion, prowling in search of prey (1 Peter 5:8). He has purposed in his heart to steal, kill, and destroy all that is God’s and all that is good on this earth.

My kids and I love to watch Animal Planet. One Saturday afternoon we watched a fascinating special on lions, and Peter’s words came to my mind. The reporter spent weeks observing a pride of lions. He followed one particular lion as she hunted her prey. After roaming for a time, the lion came upon a herd of antelope. For hours she lay in wait, pacing back and forth, watching for the opportune time to attack. The lion patiently waited until one of the antelope wandered off alone. She continued to watch to be certain no others from the herd followed the stray. Suddenly the lion appeared in sight of the antelope. She circled her prey. I could see fear in the antelope’s body. Just as the antelope took its first step to run, the lion lunged with full force and brought the desperate antelope crashing to the ground. The victim struggled and fought but eventually succumbed to the determined predator. What a picture

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of Satan! He too waits and watches. He knows where we lack strength and easily spots our vulnerabilities. There is no doubt that he will pounce in our moment of weakness.

Peter explains that it is only in God's strength that we can defeat Satan. How? First, Christ's death on the cross freed God's children from Satan's power: "For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins" (Colossians 1:13–14 NLT). Second, the power of Christ infinitely exceeds the power of the Devil: "But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world" (1 John 4:4 NLT). Finally, Christ will ultimately vanquish Satan forever: "Then the devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10 NLT). God has provided for us the means to effectively overcome our foe. We need only to accept it.

You may think that my learning about the Evil One was adding to my fear. But strangely enough, that was not the case. Instead, I felt empowered. I was beginning to believe that God's Word truly would help me overcome my fear. Why? Because I was beginning to understand Satan, sin, and, most of all, fear. Satan was the source of my fear. Fear was my stronghold. Scripture says that I do not need to be afraid of Satan or to be held captive by my stronghold.

God explains exactly how to defeat Satan: "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil" (1 Peter 5:8a NLT). These words from Peter had authority because he spoke from personal experience. Peter failed Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. His Savior and Lord asked him and the other disciples to stay awake and pray, but they fell asleep, not once but three times. Worse for Peter is that after promising Jesus he was ready to die for Him, Peter denied three times that he even knew Christ.

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After Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter and John followed behind Jesus as soldiers led Him to the temple compound for His first trial. John followed Jesus into the temple courtyard, but Peter stayed behind. As he waited outside, a young servant girl asked him if he was one of Jesus' disciples. Peter responded, "I am not" (John 18:17). Peter then made his way over to a fire to keep warm. While standing there amidst His Lord's enemies, another person asked him if he was one of Jesus' disciples. Again, Peter denied his association with the Lord. Then one of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden of Gethsemane, challenged Peter, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" (John 18:26). Peter again vehemently denied knowing Christ.

As the words tumbled from his mouth, Peter heard the unmistakable sound of the rooster crowing in the distance. At the same moment, Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter (Luke 22:61), and Peter remembered the words Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" (John 13:38b). Peter fled into the night, and Scripture says that he "wept bitterly" for denying his Lord and Savior.

You and I are no different than Peter. Satan engages us daily in a battle for our hearts. What I want you to know and to believe is that the outcome of the heavenly battle is not in question. God is sovereign, and His victory was purchased on the cross at Calvary. God has already won! God, through Christ's death on the cross, not only guarantees victory for my soul and yours, but also guarantees victory for us every day in our battles with Satan. God's power is "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:21). God is telling us that we need not fear anything in all creation . . . not even Satan himself. Listen and believe these words written by John: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8b).

Scripture encourages us to stand strong in the Lord and in His

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mighty power. Against Satan, our human effort is completely inadequate. God's power is invincible. As the lion with its prey, Satan lurks around every corner, waiting for an opportune time to attack.

*I had a weapon, and
I knew I had to wield it!*

He will watch for our place of greatest weakness. Once he finds it, he will engage in a full frontal assault.

It all began to make sense. After years of prayer, months of Bible study and personal quiet time with God, I realized that Satan was at the root of my fear. I had allowed his spirit of fear to fall upon me, and it controlled every part of my being. Satan saw me as a victim and began working on me the moment my rapist walked out the door. At every opportunity, Satan fired. I turned off the television the moment an announcer warned of a rapist loose in our city or the night a CSI episode involved a serial rapist. These were not coincidences. Satan knew I was trying to free myself from the prison of fear in which he held me, and he did everything within his power to keep me there. When Monty traveled, sounds I had never heard before emanated from my house, or the alarm would go off in the middle of the night for some unknown reason. Satan took every opportunity to return me to a place of vulnerability and weakness. He knew fear paralyzed me and left me ineffective as a wife, as a mother, and as a friend. Even more significant and most pleasing to him, I was ineffective for God.

In the early years following my attack, I was unaware that fear was Satan's work or that I had weapons to fight him. As I studied God's Word, I learned that I had not only weapons but also an arsenal at my disposal. Scripture tells me my greatest weapon is the armor of God. In Ephesians 6, God calls us to put on His armor daily so that when Satan's evil forces strike, we will be able to stand against them. With God's armor, we are ready for the battle. "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted

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with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:14–18).

Where was my battle taking place? In my mind. A spirit of fear had taken over, and the only way I was going to win was to fight using God’s armor. Specifically, I am going to focus on one particular weapon, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. To defeat Satan you **MUST** stand on the Truth of God’s Word. By now, I had been studying God’s Word for years. Much of what I had studied was used by God to do a tremendous work to this point. Yet, despite more than a decade of asking God to take away my fear, I was still afraid.

My battle with fear reached an unmatched intensity by the time we moved to Charlotte, and had taken a toll on my family. So now, hope welled up within my heart. I had a weapon, an offensive weapon, and I knew I had to wield it! Until then, I had been praying for God to take away my fear, but I had never taken His Word and used it offensively.

Satan had placed a spirit of fear on me. I had allowed it to infiltrate every part of my being. I fed it, nurtured it, and gave it a place of priority in my heart and mind. Please do not misunderstand. Hear me clearly. Satan cannot physically enter God’s children. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit, protected and loved by an all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present God. Satan cannot *make* us do anything. What he can do, however, is take advantage of what we do not know and use it to deceive us. He puts thoughts in our mind that lead us to places of lies and deception.

I sharpened my sword as I searched God’s Word for more verses on fear; four stood out to me. First, Isaiah 41:10—“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my

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righteous right hand.” Next, Psalm 34:4—“I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears,” and Psalm 23:4—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Finally, these verses pierced deeply in my soul: “He will shield you with his wings! They will shelter you. His faithful promises are your armor. Now you *don't need to be afraid of the dark any more, nor fear the dangers of the day*; nor dread the plagues of darkness, nor disasters in the morning” (Psalm 91:4–6 TLB). This last verse spoke loudly, as if God were sitting next to me, speaking directly into my ear. I feared the dark. At night, nightmares flooded my mind one after another. I awakened terrified, fully expecting to see the masked man standing over me, his cruel blue eyes inches from my face. I feared the day. *Should I get in that elevator? Should I park in that parking lot? Can I trust that man standing on the other side of my front door? Can I let the cable man in?* I was fearful twenty-four hours a day.

I took these verses and began praying them back to God. You see, the power in prayer lies in praying God's Word back to Him. It is His Word, and He must honor it. Isaiah writes, “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). God did not put a spirit of fear in me, nor did He desire it for me. I trusted that He was fully able to take it away.

I am about to share with you one of the greatest moments in my journey to wholeness and healing. God took me from victim to victor. For years, I had prayed daily—and sometimes hourly—for God to take my fear away. Since learning these verses and the power in praying them back to God, my prayers had changed. They came from deep within me . . . a place I had never accessed before. I prayed from a faith I had never known before. I did not just

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believe *in* God—I *believed* God. I trusted and believed He was more than able to do what I was asking of Him.

It was a typical Tuesday evening. Monty had left for a business trip as he had done many times before, and I began my usual routine. I put my children to bed. I searched in closets, under beds, and in empty rooms. I turned on all the lights inside and out, turned on the alarm, and then the televisions in every room. I called my girlfriend Meg, and asked her to pray. Finally, I forced myself to go to bed. As I lay there, I felt compelled to turn off the televisions. I fought the urge at first, because I knew it meant I would hear every house noise. In the end, I succumbed. With the televisions off, I lay there in silence, waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting for the fear to come as it had done for fifteen years. I continued waiting for that sense of dread and fear that always came with the night.

It never did. Instead, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and security! A feeling so foreign that I could not even remember the last time I felt it. Incredible! In that moment, I had a vision, a clear picture in my mind, of a wall of angels surrounding my house. After more than a decade of living locked inside a prison of fear, in one single moment it was gone!

Remember, I had called Meg earlier that night. Although it was now late, I felt compelled to call her and share my miracle. When I finished recounting my story, there was complete silence on the other end of the line. No words whatsoever. I was stunned. Why was she not joining in my praise? Finally, she spoke, and her words brought me to my knees . . . literally. Meg said that after I had called earlier in the evening, she and her husband had immediately prayed for me. He specifically prayed for *a wall of angels to surround my home*. I was astonished! His prayer was my vision. God's work was clearly evident. He wanted me to *know* that He alone was the reason for my newfound freedom. He did not want rationalizations and logical explanations to prevail. He wanted all the glory. That very night the spiritual battle for my heart was won in heaven. God's power and love defeated the spirit of fear that had

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imprisoned me for so many years. I fell on my knees before God that night and wept, praising Him for His faithfulness.

Please hear this Truth, my friend: God and God alone accomplished this marvelous work in my life. God's faithfulness, His goodness, His Word, His Truth, and His power set me free! Nothing more. Nothing less.

God not only answered my prayer but also my husband's prayers. For years, Monty stood by me, praying for and with me. He turned down many trips that would have benefited his career. Over the phone, he patiently listened as I poured out my fears when I was alone in the middle of the night. Without complaint, he patiently endured my irrational emotions and bizarre actions. God had shown His love and presence to me continually through my husband's steadfast love.

*This time was different.
I had peace in my heart.*

God did for me what I could not do for myself. I had tried counseling, medication, books, talk-show advice, and even prayer. You name it, I tried it. Yet it was not until I surrendered myself totally to God, and trusted and believed Him at His Word that He set me free.

Do not be deceived, my friend. Satan continued to prowl. Two years later, in early August, my kids and I were enjoying a leisurely summer day at home. At about 10:00 a.m., I decided to return some books to the library. The library was less than a five-minute drive from our house. I thought of leaving the kids but decided against it since my son had a friend visiting. We left the house, drove to the library, and dropped the books in the return slot outside the building. We arrived home about 10:20 a.m. As I opened the door from the garage, I glanced into the den and noticed a window missing. Someone had taken it out completely. We had recently had work done on the house, so I thought that perhaps one of the workers had come to replace the window. However, I did not see a truck anywhere. The kids came in, and we called Monty

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to see if the contractor had called him about the window. Immediately, he told me to leave the house and dial 9-1-1. Within minutes, the police arrived, told us to stay back, pulled their guns, and entered the house. Since we had been gone only fifteen minutes, they were concerned the intruders might still be in the house. After a thorough search, they confirmed that burglars had broken into our home.

I walked into my dining room. The thieves had ripped the doors off my beautiful antique china cabinet in the dining room, and my silver was gone. I climbed up the stairs to my bedroom and discovered that all my jewelry was gone . . . every last piece. The burglars had dumped my entire jewelry box upside down and left nothing. Police filled my home, as they had on that day years ago. A crime team came to dust for fingerprints. They interviewed me and gave me a crime report to complete. It was reminiscent of June 7, 1986, all over again.

However, this time it was different. I had peace in my heart. The experience did not take me back to that place of fear and anxiety that imprisoned me for years. Yes, I was angry. Yes, I was devastated that my jewelry was gone, particularly my grandmother's heirlooms. God, in His faithfulness, protected me from returning to my stronghold. I was not afraid. In fact, I remember in the moment praising Him for prompting me to take my children with me and not leaving them at home alone. They would have been upstairs in the playroom, and the thieves would have come in, not knowing there were children upstairs. Who knows what could have happened?

That is not to say I was unaffected. I had Monty put better locks on the windows; we had the alarm company come to determine why the alarm did not sound, and I now hide my jewelry. This event should have sent me into a downward spiral, but it did not. I tell you this part of my story because I want you to see that God is bigger than anything Satan throws at us. When God gives victory, it is complete. You need never worry about it again.

HIDDEN JOY *in a* DARK CORNER

Fear was my stronghold, but there are so many others. No matter your stronghold, God is fully able to remove it. He does not want anything to hold you captive, my friend. You have the power through His Word and His Holy Spirit to defeat your stronghold. It takes faith, work, and total surrender.

Do you have a stronghold in your life? Do you live your days controlled by something other than God's Holy Spirit? Do you feel locked in a prison? Do you want to make decisions from a place other than fear, worry, or bitterness? I challenge you to ponder the following question: Do you believe God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do? If you do, surrender your stronghold to God, harness the power available to you in His Word and through His Spirit, and watch your prison doors fling wide open.