

BREAKING DOWN WALLS

You, Lord, are my lamp;
the Lord turns my darkness into light.
With your help I can advance against a troop[a];
with my God I can scale a **WALL**.

2 Samuel 22:29-30

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A BATTLE WORTH FIGHTING

CHRISTIAN CHAPMAN

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First and foremost I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without You I obviously wouldn't be writing this book. The more I think about my past failures, ongoing shortcomings, and the walls I have faced in my life, the more my heart is drawn to You. Where else could I find a love that never fails? You are my light in times of darkness, my shelter in the midst of storms, and my best friend when the world rejects me. Thank You for Your love, thank You for Your grace, and thank You for enduring the cross. I love You, my King.

To my beautiful wife, Amy . . . How far we have come since that blind date in 1987! I knew immediately that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you, and my love for you has grown and deepened with each passing year. Even during difficult or uncertain times, you have been supportive and faithful to the call God has on my life. I look forward to serving our Lord together in the days and seasons to come as we continue to listen for that still, quiet voice to lead us. I love you, baby!

To my three boys, Malachi, Isaiah, and Jeremiah . . . I am so thankful that God ordained me to be your father. You are the

greatest gifts God has ever given your mother and me, and we are so proud of you. I pray that someday you will read this book and it will help you put on the full armor of God and keep up your guard against Satan's attacks. May you become the men God has created you to be and release a tsunami of God's gracious love to a lost world. I love you, boys, and I believe in you and in the call God has on your lives.

To my father . . . Thank you for being the best father a prodigal son could have. You have been my hero since I was a child, but you became Superman for sure when you were diagnosed with cancer in 2010. The way you have faced this terror head-on with a strong faith in God has challenged me to give my trials to the Lord and allow Him to use them for His glory. I am selfishly asking God to give you many more years on this earth not only because of our love for each other but so you that can teach me many more lessons. I love you, Pops, and I look forward to many more rounds of golf together at the lake.

To my mother . . . You were the cornerstone of my crumbling foundation during the self-destructive period of my youth. As I ran from God, you faithfully stood by my side and spent many nights praying for the Lord to keep me safe as I found my way back to Him. You have always encouraged me to believe I could do all things if I would allow God to control my heart. I am who I am today because of your love, and I want you to know how grateful I am to have you as my mom. Never stop praying for me and my family. I love you, Momma!

And finally, to you the reader . . . I pray that this book will challenge you to recognize what you have overlooked, confront what you have kept hidden, and stand up and fight for the abundant life God has for you. As you read this book, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. My prayer is that by the time you finish reading the book you will be slinging a sledgehammer and

tearing down the walls Satan would use to keep you from experiencing the life God wants you enjoy through His Son Jesus. Peace!

CHAPTER 1

LET'S GET IT ON!

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.
– Ephesians 6:10–11

The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) is America's fastest-growing sport, and John McCarthy is its most famous referee. "Big John," a Los Angeles police officer until his retirement in 2007, has been with the UFC since its beginning in the early 90s. His face is well-known in the mixed martial arts world, but his words are even more recognizable. When two fighters square off for battle, Big John makes his way to the center of the ring, claps his hands, and screams, "Let's get it on!" After hearing those words, there is no doubt in the fighters' minds—they are in a fight.

We begin our journey to break down walls by acknowledging we are in a fight, not for a UFC belt and a six-figure contract but for eternal life itself. It's worth the fight, so let's get it on!

PREPARING FOR BATTLE

We know from Acts 16:37 and 22:25 that the apostle Paul was a Roman citizen. Born in the Roman province of Cilicia, about the same time as Jesus, Paul would have known the importance of being prepared for battle. In his day Roman gladiators would enter the arena and literally fight to the death as the audience cheered. Paul might have witnessed firsthand these gladiators fighting to survive and to please the crowd's bloodthirsty nature. He might have even watched as they prepared themselves for the fight of their lives with helmets, shields, and weapons of all kinds.

Every spectator of the games would have been aware of the grisly consequences of a gladiator not being prepared for battle. Maybe this is why Paul focuses, in Ephesians 6:10–17, on “putting on the full armor of God”—rather than encouraging folks to grab a swimsuit, umbrella, and tanning lotion and head to the beach. Maybe he wanted the believers in Ephesus to understand the same thing I am pressing hard for as we begin this book: The Christian life is a battle!

EXPOSING MY OWN WALL

I am married to a beautiful and talented woman of God. She is an amazing mother and the most faithful wife a man could hope for. But starting in 2009 Amy and I found ourselves, after twenty years of marriage, in the fight of our lives—a fight to protect the covenant we took before God in 1989.

What was the problem? It wasn't love, because we had passionately loved each other for more than twenty years. It wasn't unfaithfulness, because if either of us was in a room with the most attractive and interesting people on the planet, neither of us would

give them a second look. It wasn't finances, because the bills were getting paid. The problem was that we were locked into arguing. We were arguing about who would do the dishes. We were arguing about who would do the laundry. We were arguing about the discipline of our children. We were arguing about who took the dogs out last. We were arguing about the culinary choice for supper and whose turn it was to fix it. Our house went from a house of love to a war zone resembling the storming of the beaches of Normandy during World War II.

In 2012 Amy and I came to an agreement that we had to go through counseling to save our marriage and to restore the health of our children, who were obviously being affected. Their personalities were changing, their grades were dropping, and their teachers were informing us that they were becoming more aggressive in class. So we went to our pastor, who referred us to Grace Life International, a counseling ministry in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Our counselor, Ted, was a very loving and compassionate man of God. After two intense sessions of digging up all our family history and background, Ted called us into his office to go over all the results. He looked straight at us and said, “You guys are going to be fine—I can tell that you love each other very much. But I need to see one of you for several sessions, to work on some issues, before I begin to meet with both of you.”

Before I could catch myself, I blurted out, “When do you want me to bring her?”

Amy turned to me with a look of shock on her face. And Ted, with a small grin on his face, replied, “It's not her that I need to see.”

Ted went on to state that I needed to deal with some issues from my past and that these issues were continuing to affect the decisions I was making. It was hard for me to accept this, yet all the way home Amy reminded me of all the times I had blamed

her. It was clear that something needed to be done, because we found ourselves in another screaming match for the rest of the day. My pride had been squashed, my ego decimated, my hero status revoked, but God had a plan—for a wall was about to come down.

I prepared to go to my first session by checking off the items on my man list: 1) Watch *Braveheart*; 2) Purchase next UFC pay-per-view fighting event; 3) Hang out with the homeboys at Wild Wings Bar and Grill; 4) Go hunting for a fresh new kill; 5) Watch *SportsCenter* on ESPN. Now that everything was complete, I felt ready for my first session.

When I walked in, the first thing Ted addressed was the wound I had received in 1985 as a result of my parents going through a separation and divorce. My first response was to defend this wall that had been built in my heart. I lashed out, “That’s the past; it’s been forgiven; I’ve moved on. So what’s your point?”

Ted looked at me with compassionate eyes, and after a long pause his response to me was nothing less than God’s voice from heaven: “Christian, the last time your heart was open your family crushed it, and since that day you have lived your life inflicting wounds on others so you don’t have to open your heart again and let them inflict wounds on you. You’re always on the offensive, you’re always on the attack, which is why you find yourself arguing with your wife, intimidating your children, and severing relationships with close friends.”

I will never forget the shame I felt in that moment. As the tears began to fall, I looked at Ted and asked, “How do I fix this? How can I overcome this wall?” I will also never forget what Ted said next: “Flesh can’t fix the flesh, Christian. Only God can fix the flesh. You must open your heart and allow the Spirit of God to heal what’s been wounded, to restore what’s been stolen, and to set free what’s been imprisoned.”

Once I accepted the truth, I experienced incredible freedom in that moment. Just admitting that a wall existed allowed God to come in and start a path of healing in my life. That wall, which had imprisoned me since 1985, started to crumble!

Amy and I completed our counseling and took the necessary steps to see our marriage restored. Our marriage has never been better! We now pray together as a family every night. We sit down and enjoy supper together as a family, whereas the fighting used to be so fierce we spent little quality time together. Our children are making straight A’s again, and a recent report from a teacher confirms that God is moving in our family because their smiles have returned, their shoulders no longer slump, and their aggression has subsided. Isn’t it amazing that when we confront our personal walls other people’s lives are affected in a positive way as well?

Now that I have opened my closet door for all to see, hopefully you are willing to admit you have a wall that needs to be confronted as well. Maybe it’s time to let down your guard and confront what you have been hiding. The devil loves secrets, which is probably why James tells us, in James 5:16, to confess our sins to each other. Now is the time to look deep within yourself, as I did recently, and allow God to break down the wall that you have been holding on to for way too long.

GLADIATOR GEAR

How are you going to do it? By preparing for battle and putting on the full armor of God. In Ephesians 6:10–12 we see that Paul was encouraging us to be prepared, knowing that we are in the fight of our lives. “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” (verse 12). Paul starts off this way to give us a firm grasp of what lies ahead of us as Christians, and then he writes of the armor and weapons with which we will fight. Let’s take a closer look at this armor Paul writes about in Ephesians 6:13–17 so that we can become familiar with what protects us in times of battle.

THE BELT OF TRUTH

The first item in our arsenal is found in verse 14: “Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth.” Of all the things Paul could have chosen to start with in regard to slaying the enemy, why would he choose “the belt of truth”? Let’s not forget our previous observation about Paul being a Roman citizen who knew the ways of the gladiators and understood that after a warrior’s armor was assembled and fitted in place it was all connected and held together by the belt. If the belt became unconnected, the armor would fall and the gladiator or soldier was left exposed—reminding me of a clip I saw on *America’s Funniest Home Videos* of an older gentleman dancing at a wedding reception when his belt came undone and his pants dropped to the floor.

Why is truth so important when it comes to breaking down walls? Jesus is the truth; and as He stated in John 8:32, it is His truth that will set us free. This is so critical in a world that continues to pull further and further away from the teachings of Christ. Many today are pulling away from God’s Word and elevating their personal views above uncompromised truth. It’s no wonder that so many walls stand in the world today, even in the church. Because people have walked away from the truth, their belt has come unlatched and their pants are around their feet. To see Grandpa exposed on the dance floor might be funny, but for a gladiator or Roman soldier to lose his belt in battle meant certain death. And in my opinion, it’s that serious for you and me as well.

THE BODY ARMOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The second item is also mentioned in verse 14: “Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness.” The body armor, commonly referred to as a breastplate, was a sleeveless piece of leather that completely covered a soldier’s torso, protecting his heart and other vital organs. This shows us how seriously Paul took living a life of righteousness. He knew that a Christian who lived a righteous life would be protected and strong when the enemy came to attack, just as he knew how vulnerable a follower of Christ would be if he or she did not practice holy living.

When I spoke in Savannah, Georgia several years ago, my boys and I got to spend a day at nearby Fort Stewart, hanging out with some of America’s finest. We were escorted around the base by the sergeant major, who had seen a lot of action during two tours of duty in the Middle East. When he asked if my boys would like to be junior troopers for the day and see the base in style, we readily agreed—though I have to admit I was more excited than they were as we jumped in and out of helicopters and tanks. During our tour I noticed that everywhere we went men stood at attention and gave the sergeant major a quick, “Yes, sir!” Men lounging on top of tanks jumped down and gave a quick salute, soldiers talking outside of buildings formed straight lines, and everyone listened and obeyed his voice with the utmost respect. I discovered that the sergeant major was always the first one into battle, and thus had earned his comrades’ respect.

Has Jesus’ sacrifice not earned your respect? Have enough people not been hurt by our disobedience? Just as a Roman soldier was exposed when one piece of his armor was missing, so we as Christians are exposed when our hearts are given over to unrighteousness. Satan got to Adam and Eve when their guard was

down, when their armor was exposed, when their hearts were left unguarded. He was successful because of their unrighteous choice, and the world has suffered ever since.

THE SHOES OF PEACE

The third item is found in verse 15: “For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.” You might be wondering what the big deal is about showing up to fight with a pair of shoes. I hear you, but stick with me because each piece is very important when it comes to breaking down walls and winning the victory. Paul knew that the Roman soldiers wore boots with nails in them, which helped them not to slip while they were fighting. When people slip and fall they usually recover quickly, but to fall in battle was no laughing matter—it was a death sentence. God wants us, as Christians, to have peace from the gospel so that we can stand firm when the attack of the enemy comes our way.

Many Christians today can’t begin to defend why they are a believer, much less lead someone else to Christ. Being unsure of your faith and unable to defend your beliefs puts you on a very slippery slope. You need to know the truth and stand firm in it. There is nothing more peaceful and beautiful than a believer who knows why he or she has been set free by the truth, is clothed in God’s righteousness, and is standing firm on the Good News.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

The fourth item is in verse 16: “In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.” Recently I watched a TV show on the History network with my son Malachi about the battle of three hundred Spartan warriors who fought

against King Xerxes and the Persians. According to tradition, three hundred Spartan soldiers held off a force some believe to have been in the hundreds of thousands. The key was their shields: They formed a wall of protection with their shields, and these men would dig in and hold off the attack while comrades from behind would strike with their long spears. According to historical accounts of the Battle of Thermopylae, three hundred Spartans were able to kill thousands upon thousands of Persians. Still today, battle strategists will refer to this battle in warning those about to fight how dangerous and successful a warrior is when he is defending his family and home soil.

The Roman soldiers also used their shield in an effective way. Their shields, which covered their entire bodies, were dipped in an oil that would extinguish the fiery arrows of the enemy. Paul said to “hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil,” because a warrior with a strong shield will find victory on his side more times than not. I tell people all the time that faith is something the devil can’t stop, and when your faith is strong you are a dangerous weapon for the kingdom of God.

Satan will fight hard to stop you from tearing down walls, using everything in his arsenal to keep you separated from God and unable to see who God has created you to be. Faith is what you will need when the enemy’s fiery arrows are coming your way. Faith is what you will need when this book gets tough and you want to lay it down.

THE HELMET OF SALVATION

The fifth item in the armor of God is found in verse 17: “Put on salvation as your helmet.” I’m sure you would agree that having your head exposed in battle would be a big mistake, but you might be wondering what the connection is between protecting

your head and salvation. To answer this, I need to share a bit of my testimony.

The 1980s might have been good to heavy-metal bands, love songs, big hair, *Star Wars*, and tight-fitting jeans, but they weren't good to one lost teenager in Kannapolis, North Carolina. I went from being a popular athlete and straight-A student to being a young man who was struggling to stay alive. The downhill slide started when my parents went through a nasty divorce. Eventually I sank into rebellion, drinking, doing drugs, fighting, and becoming homeless in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. After spending a night in the hospital because of drugs, I decided to go back home. I got a job working with my dad at Charlotte Honda, putting bikes together; and the weekends were filled with racing.

One night I decided to go to a party with the guys from the shop, which usually led to a night I could barely remember the next day. This night would be different, however, and in fact would change my life forever. After not drinking or doing any drugs, which was highly unusual, I left the party about 3 a.m. But my bike ran out of gas on the highway right outside the city limits. After thumbing for a ride for thirty minutes, a taxi driver picked me up, took me to get some gas, and brought me back to my bike—which cost me all the money I had in my wallet. I put gas in the bike and waved goodbye to the taxi driver, only to realize I had left my keys in the cab and was still stuck on the highway far from home in the early morning hours.

After sitting there for a while contemplating my situation, life, and future, I cried out to a God I wasn't sure existed and asked for forgiveness from a Savior I wasn't sure loved me. I asked God to reveal His love to me, and I vowed that if He did I would never question or deny His existence again. I cried out for God's grace for a life filled with drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, lies,

and deception; and I asked God to reveal that grace through the message of love.

As soon as I prayed that prayer, I opened my eyes to see a car pulled off to the side of the road as if it appeared out of nowhere. I walked up to the car and looked inside after the driver rolled down the window. I noticed a Bible on the passenger seat. I felt the Holy Spirit all around me as God's plan was starting to be revealed to my unbelieving mind for the first time. I looked at the driver, a large black man, and heard him speak these life-giving words to me: "The Lord told me to pick you up and tell you He loves you tonight."

At 4 a.m., on the side of a highway outside Charlotte, North Carolina, salvation came to my heart. And this faith has helped me extinguish all the fiery arrows of the enemy.

In regard to salvation being our helmet and protecting a vital part of our body, let me ask you if you see the power and importance of our salvation. Paul talked quite often about his conversion and the grace he received that day on the road to Damascus. Why? Because there is a lot of power in a Jesus story. Do you think the young boy mentioned in John 6:9 ever stopped talking about the day this man named Jesus took his five loaves and two fish and fed five thousand people? Do you think the paralyzed man portrayed in Luke 5:17–26 ever stopped praising God after being healed of his affliction? Do you think the deaf and mute man depicted in Mark 7:31–35 ever stopped telling others of his healing after Jesus restored his hearing and speech? And do you think the woman about to be stoned, as recounted in John 8, ever stopped sharing the story of how her new hero Jesus spared her from torture and death at the hands of the Pharisees' stones?

If your answer to these questions is no, then I think you understand the importance of having salvation as a helmet. If there is one thing science can't explain, atheists can't defeat, and other

religions don't understand, it's your Jesus story! Wear it today and every day as a helmet, and never forget the depths from which you have been saved. Wear your helmet with pride and power wherever you go, because I promise that you will need to remember it. While the battle is raging, you will need to protect yourself with it; and while confronting walls in the process of reading this book, you will need to rely on it.

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

At last we come to the one item in the armor of God that is actually a weapon: "And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (verse 17). If you're a man, you're probably thinking, *Yeah, baby, I finally get a sword—time to inflict some wounds!* Well, let's not forget Ephesians 6:11, where we are encouraged to "stand firm against all strategies of the devil," which is more of a defensive posture than an offensive one. So don't go looking for a fight with the enemy, because that's when we get ahead of God's plan and fall into unknown traps.

Don't worry, those of you who have a warrior spirit, the devil will bring you all you want and then some. It's important, however, to understand why Paul would encourage us to stand firm with the word of God. The apostle John began his gospel by declaring, "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). John was connecting this verse with Genesis 1:1, which says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." John was letting his readers know that before the world was created, before particles and dust were in space, Jesus was with God. This is good to know, because if the sword we hold was there when the universe was created, there

when all creation was birthed, there when God breathed life into man, and there before Satan tempted Adam and Eve, then how could anything in this world come against us?

When we take the Word of God into our hearts, we literally have within us something as old and powerful as time and creation itself. Way too many Christians I meet today are not taking in the Word of God, but rather leave it shut up in a drawer of their homes much like Gideon Bibles stay shut up in the drawers of hotel rooms across America.

John also points out that "the word *was* God," which leaves no room for error when it comes to understanding that there is only one way to heaven—and it is through a relationship with the Word (Jesus Christ). Many religions, and even some Christian denominations, say there are many different ways to heaven that can be obtained through many different paths of travel in life's journey. If we truly know this Word, then we understand that Jesus didn't mince words when He said, in John 10:9, "I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved." Or again, in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." This is so important, because if we try to bring down walls or fight by the power of any other name than Jesus, then we will fail and walls will still be left standing.

So it all begins and ends with Christ. Do you truly know the Word? Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? Are you drinking from His fountain of living water, or from the world's well that will eventually leave you thirsty again? Does the Word of God live within you? It's a game changer for sure, and if you will embrace this Word and the armor of God by which Paul tells us we should fight, then I believe you are ready for battle.

DON'T LOSE FOCUS

So if you know there is a wall in your life and you are ready to confront it, *don't lose focus!* Let me illustrate this point with a story. A few years ago I planned a special date for my wife's birthday. We would begin our night with fine dining at the Passion8 Bistro, one of the finest restaurants in Charlotte, and then head to a special event at the Cricket Arena. After eating at one of her favorite restaurants, Amy was shocked when I said we had somewhere else to go. "There's more?" she asked. "Oh yeah, baby, the best is yet to come."

When we arrived at the Cricket Arena the parking lot was completely full and police were everywhere. We had never seen such a big crowd for an event there. When Amy walked in and saw the UFC "Octagon" in the center of the arena and thousands of fans screaming at the top of their lungs, she said, "Are you kidding me?! Is this my birthday or yours?!" I wasn't offended at all, and was willing to go through a little abuse to see my first live UFC event.

The energy of the crowd that night was amazing, the fights were exciting, and the light show and all the professionalism that goes into a UFC event were very entertaining. One of the highlights of the night was a heavyweight fight featuring Roy "Big Country" Nelson and Stefan "The Skyscraper" Struve. As they entered the ring, Amy immediately picked The Skyscraper to dominate the fight. At 6'11" and 261 pounds, Struve was one lean and mean physical specimen. Nelson, on the other hand, was overweight and bragged that his regular training routine included eating at Burger King. Even though Amy determined it wouldn't be much of a match, I wasn't buying it. I had seen Nelson fight in past UFC events, so I knew that even though his belly was big, his right hand was vicious.

The fighters were introduced and the referee made his way to the center of the ring. Just as he was about to start the fight, the power went out in the arena. Fans screamed as red floodlights flashed on and police rushed in. Chaos seemed to be breaking out, and I started getting nervous about how I was going to get Amy out of there if a mob mentality took over. As I was about to lead us toward the exit, I noticed that Dana White, the president of the UFC, had made his way to the back of the arena and was pacing back and forth while frantically waving his hands in the air. This was a live event on the Spike TV network, so the stakes were high.

The outside of the building and the upper seats were dark, but the floodlights had the center of the arena and the ring lit up. I looked at the two fighters in the ring and noticed something strange. The Skyscraper, Struve, had turned his back on his opponent; with his arms draped over the top of the ring, he was relaxing while talking to his coach. Big Country, however, never took his eyes off his opponent, and was pacing back and forth with an intense look on his face. He didn't talk to his coach, he didn't look at the fans—he kept his eyes and focus on his opponent.

The power was soon restored, the referee made his way back to the center of the ring, and the fight began. Within thirty-nine seconds Nelson knocked out Struve, which was the first time The Skyscraper had ever tasted the canvas. Big Country began to celebrate with his normal routine of jumping on top of the Octagon fence and rubbing his big belly with one hand while pointing at the crowd and thanking them with the other. Amy screamed, "I never thought he would win." But my response was, "Only one guy came to fight tonight."

Are you focused and ready to keep your eyes fixed on the prize? Are you ready to see some walls fall down? Even when chaos is breaking out around you and you feel like the power connection is lost, you can still have the victory!

So let us begin our journey, remembering the words of Christian author C. S. Lewis, “God, who foresaw your tribulation, has specially armed you to go through it, not without pain but without stain.”

Let’s get it on!