



A WARRIOR'S JOURNAL

WINNING THE SACRED STRUGGLE

BY SETH BARNES

TO THE MANY WARRIORS WITH WHOM I WORK
WHO SHOW ME WHAT IT MEANS
TO FIGHT FOR SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE IN.

A WARRIOR'S JOURNAL

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Dear readers,

I've written this spiritual guidebook to help you take on an enemy who has you squarely in his sights. I hope you find it helpful.

Early church history shows us that in a little more than 300 years, Christianity went from a small band of desperate men to the official religion of the Roman world.

How did this happen? It happened because of the absolute conviction of Jesus' disciples. They were warriors for the faith, and they passed on this conviction to their disciples. They moved out boldly against enemies who thought nothing of stoning them to death because they were absolutely convinced God was on their side.

That warrior spirit that Jesus gave His disciples is our inheritance. How in the world did we ever get on the defensive? Hey folks, I've got news for you: our side wins! We have been given spiritual armor. We have been given all authority. And we have been given the task of bringing hope to a world that is numb with pain.

I've organized this book to help you not just learn, but to practice the foundations of life as a warrior. Used in tandem with a mission trip, it can turn your time in the field into a laboratory, a place of ingesting and applying the Word of God. Sometimes the prayers you pray or the questions you ask may feel experimental; they may make you feel uncomfortable. Let me encourage you in your discomfort – that's how you grow.

You'll notice that the prayers are organized to facilitate your listening prayer. Follow the acronym ALOE: Ask, Listen, Obey, and Evaluate. By doing this, you'll develop the habit of not simply praying to God, but interacting with Him.

If it works, then it should facilitate the Lord's work in your life.

God bless you richly as you advance His Kingdom in your corner of the world.

*Yours for the battle,
Seth*

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INTRODUCTION: YOU'RE IN THE FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE!

“OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD...”

EPHESIANS 6:12

With Adam’s fall, God gave the devil permission to move in and claim this world as his own. Call it squatter’s rights. Jesus’ arrival signaled something new. The battle turned and Satan was bound by the power of the Son of God. Jesus proclaimed that it was time for Satan to pack his bags: “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31). He enforced this proclamation by driving out demons and binding the prince of darkness, the “strong man” of this world. Jesus said,

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? (Matt 12:28-29)

Jesus struck back through His death and resurrection. He said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). And today His voice still thunders across the globe: “I am not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9)!

He has blessed us with the privilege of continuing to expand His Kingdom. As His disciples, we are called to destroy strongholds of evil and reclaim the world for Him. The history of the Lord’s people is an account of a steady push deeper into enemy territory, reclaiming what is rightfully His, one life at a time.

Around the world today the battle is raging. It is a spiritual battle not observable to the human eye. A story is unfolding and God is the protagonist of it – He will show Himself strong and drive all squatters from His lands. Those of us who have given our lives to Jesus as Lord are His warriors – the very instruments through which He wages warfare. If God used a pagan Assyrian

king as His battle-axe, how much more will he use us, His servants, to fight the enemy? As Paul says, “God has blessed us with divine power to destroy the strongholds of the enemy” (2Cor 10:4,5)!

A young Knight of the Order of St. John ran to his Grand Master’s fortress on Malta, telling him that their forces at the small fort of St. Elmo could no longer hold out against the massive Turkish army. The Grand Master responded that they were unworthy of the honor of defending the fort – that they didn’t measure up to their fathers in battle. With renewed resolve, the knight begged to return to the blazing inferno of St. Elmo. The army of the Ottoman Empire, the largest in the world in 1565, bombarded so viciously that St. Elmo disappeared under a cloud. Hours later when the smoke cleared, the cross of St. John still flew above the ruins.

What kind of “faith of the fathers” sustained the young knight? What kept the knights steadfast against odds estimated at 100 to 1? Their fathers, fighting the Turks against the same odds, would rather die than yield a single inch of ground to the enemies of the cross.

God gave the pioneer missionary, Amy Carmichael, a vision of great masses of humanity, walking zombie-like toward a cliff. Terrified, she ran from person to person, trying to get them to see what lay ahead. When she awoke from this vision, she realized that she had seen the world from God’s perspective.

With each passing minute, thousands more stumble over eternity’s cliff. Do we have Carmichael’s sense of urgency when we hear Christ’s call to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10)?

This battle of ours looks unlike any other. Jesus tells us to despise godlessness and sin, but to love our enemies, rather like the hippies did to the National Guard troops during the sixties, putting flowers in the muzzles of their guns. It’s a paradox. We are called to fight, but not against flesh-and-blood sinners, only against the spiritual forces that oppress them: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). Christians often wrongly treat sinners as if they are our enemies instead of having mercy on them. But rather than struggle with them, we are called to the sacred task of rescuing them from the power of darkness by which they are enslaved.

YOUR THREE ROLES

As a Christian, whether you feel the heat of the conflict or not, you are officially enlisted in this sacred struggle for the ultimate liberation and freedom of men. You have been called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the world's greatest revolutionary. And in following Him you have been given three quite different roles: a warrior, an ambassador, and a minister of reconciliation. All are needed in the conflict in which we are engaged; all are effective in different ways.

The Warrior

Your first role is to be a spiritual warrior, just as Abraham, David, and all the saints of old ...

who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. (Hebrews 11:33-34)

You fight alongside them for the Lord in this conflict spanning time and space, confronting an unseen enemy who wants to kill you. A warrior is known for his action. He takes the fight to the enemy.

We must move aggressively to be effective as warriors, while remembering that there is a fine line between the aggressive-yet-compassionate activist and the bullying zealot. Our activism is only valid as it is rooted in compassion. We all like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6); we've all messed up. We are not superheroes; we're wounded warriors. We may move forth fearlessly, but we do so with tears in our eyes, identifying with the pain that others must endure.

The Ambassador

Next, let's look at the role of ambassador. Engaging the enemy can require different approaches, so it's nice to know that an ambassador's finesse is a part of our repertoire. Second Corinthians 5:20 says, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." In writing to the Ephesians, Paul calls himself an ambassador in chains and asks for prayer that he might be fearless (Ephesians 6:19-20).

An ambassador represents the views of his country and his leader, not his own. He is like a glove – the visible representation of the hand wearing it. In the same way, if we are effective as ambassadors, then God will be able to make His appeal to a lost world through us. We Christians are Jesus' only representatives here on earth. People can't see Him, but they can see us. This is why Paul talks about the church he has planted in Corinth as a living letter from Christ:

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Cor 3:2-3)

We are Christ's letters to the world! Many people learn about God from observing us live our lives. It should humble us to realize the enormous importance of our task as ambassadors.

Though ambassadors have finesse and diplomacy, they first and foremost represent another. We therefore must not be afraid to challenge the complacency or bondage that people find themselves in. Jesus is a revolutionary. That means His views are a threat to those in power, those with a stake in a sinful status quo. Following someone like that can put our lives in jeopardy. It can make our knees knock! That's why Paul asked for prayer to be fearless. We simply can't entertain fear as we represent a worldview that seems crazy to many people blinded by the prince of this world. We must be bold. We must soak up every ounce of conviction possible so that it can be squeezed out of us at the proper moment. The Jesus whose ambassador we are moves boldly in the presence of enemies.

The Minister of Reconciliation

Being ministers of reconciliation is our third role as we engage in this struggle. Just as God reconciled us to Himself through Christ, so He has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). He calls us ministers of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:6). All of us are born sinners, estranged from God, living life according to our own desires. Equipped with the Holy Spirit, we are given the words and actions that will woo wayward hearts.

In our own strength, we might repeat a rote list of Scriptures or share a tract and call it done. But the heart doesn't often work that way. A minister of reconciliation who waits on the Spirit for direction doesn't just go tromping off to find it. Spirit-led ministers listen for the sounds of

brokenness and yearning in a heart that needs reconciling to its creator. And then, as a tender intermediary, such a minister makes clear the opportunity for reconciliation.

Ultimately each person must choose for or against this hope. He or she must choose whether to let loose anger or whatever has kept them separated from God. But it is our privilege to deftly assume the three roles given us as ambassadors, warriors, and ministers, in order to make that reconciliation between God and man possible.

WARRIORS IN SCRIPTURE

The paradox of our spiritual battle is heightened because the Bible is full of the bloody accounts of physical battle. Wherever His Kingdom is advancing, God's people have been willing to lay down their lives as they engage the enemy. It's simply the price of capturing new territory. He asks us to do the same, though perhaps in a different sense: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).

But while we are called to fight, we do not fight as others do. Take for example the Islamic jihad warriors. Their battle is a physical one. They fight to the death, while our fight brings life. They wield swords, while we turn the other cheek to our physical enemies, waging battle against spiritual principalities and powers of darkness that hold our physical foes enslaved. We desire not to strike against our enemies with violence, but to free them with love. To outsiders, it is a perplexing way to fight, but such was Jesus' revolution.

In this study, we'll look at three examples of the Lord's people taking territory back from the enemy. In each, a powerful leader and his small band of followers plunge boldly into enemy territory. In 1 Chronicles, the Israelites lost territory to the Philistines. David leads an army to get the land back. In Matthew 10, Jesus sends his disciples out to surrounding villages to heal the sick, raise the dead, and preach the good news. It was an open display of bravado and power in a dark land, a provocative, offensive thrust into enemy territory. And in Acts 20 and 21, Paul returns to take on those in Jerusalem who want to kill him, courageously confronting the enemy on his own turf.

Each day's devotional will pull principles from one or more of these passages. You'll see that God did not intend for us to be passive in our faith. He wants us to take on the enemy, and in so doing, to rescue the lost.

David and His Mighty Men: 1 Chronicles 10-14

Because the battle for which Jesus outfits us is a spiritual one, the parallels with David and his mighty men may seem to be a stretch. After all, his battle *was* physical. David fought for his life with actual weapons, whereas the sword and shield that Ephesians 6 describes are metaphorical.

However, we can glean many principles that help us better understand our role as warriors and the Lord's strategy for us. God didn't include these passages simply in order that we might have a better sense of Israel's history. He wants us to learn life lessons.

Saul had botched things up pretty badly. His compromises had led to the defeat of Israel, his own death and the death of his sons. His army was so thoroughly routed that the Israelites abandoned their towns and fled (1 Chr 10:7).

When they regrouped at Hebron, David was the obvious choice to lead them. He had been their general; now he would be their king. His first step was to quickly capture Jerusalem from the Jebusites. His next step was to rebuild it and to prepare his army to take on the Philistines again.

While as followers of Jesus, our battle is in spiritual realms, David's battles were physically gory affairs. Nevertheless, David set the biblical standard for courage and for trusting the Lord for both the large-scale struggle and each individual battle's strategy. Israel's leaders eagerly followed him. We've got much to learn from David.

Jesus and His Mighty Men: Matthew 9-10

Jesus began by announcing His battle strategy not only to His disciples, but to thousands of others on the side of a mountain in Galilee. It was completely different from David's strategy. He said things like, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary." "Don't resist an evil person." "Love your enemies." Those followers of His who were spoiling for a fight must have been perplexed. It would be like asking the Chicago Bears to put on tutus and dance Swan Lake.

Jesus knew that His followers would have to see such a radical program in action to begin to understand how it worked. So after preaching His heart out to the multitudes, He took his show on the road. Matthew 8 and 9 describe how He modeled His strategy for His disciples. In chapter 10 He says in essence, “OK boys, you’ve seen me do the stuff; now you give it a whirl.”

His disciples went out as Jesus had taught them. They went in pairs, taking almost nothing with them, kind of like Navy SEALs. Their mission, though, was to bring the Lord’s healing presence to a broken land. They went out with trepidation and pounding hearts, Jesus’ words ringing in their ears, “All men will hate you because of me . . . whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 10:22, 39).

Of course they were successful. So much so that Jesus increased their number by 600% and sent them out again (Luke 10). The results were spectacular. Though they took nothing with them, they were given the equivalent of spiritual light sabers and made short work of the enemy wherever they went. Not only did Jesus go out as a warrior into enemy territory, He imparted that same warrior spirit to His disciples.

Paul and His Mighty Men: Acts 20-21

Early on in his ministry, Paul is more of a Special Forces officer. He and his recruiter, Barnabas, assisted by their young apprentice John Mark, leave for parts unknown in a kind of probing mission. Wanting to test their mettle, the devil immediately sent one of his minions, a sorcerer named Bar-Jesus to confront them in hand-to-hand combat (Acts 13). Paul, using the sword of the Spirit, swatted him like a fly striking him blind.

By the time of Acts 20, Paul is a seasoned veteran. Like Jesus, he is training disciples, young leaders like Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, and Tychicus. Having planted churches throughout Greece and Turkey, he feels the Lord calling him to return to the heart of darkness, Jerusalem, a place where he knows a trap has been set for him.

When he arrives in Jerusalem, Paul is captured and beaten by Jews who want to kill him, is rescued by Roman soldiers, thrown into prison, brought before a series of tribunals, and is the object of a 40-person plot to kill him. Fortunately, Jesus had already given precise instructions as to what to do in such situations. Paul knew that on His account he’d be brought before governors

and kings to witness to them, *and* that the Lord Himself would give him the words to say (Matt 10:17-20).

Paul's courage must have been an inspiration to his followers. Here was a warrior who was not only a master strategist; he was fearless in battle, willing to take the enemy on at any time, any place.

Women Engaged in the Struggle

Because the three previous illustrations concern men, some might conclude that women are exempt from a warrior's life. But this warfare is for us all: both male and female have been called into spiritual combat together. As Peter declared at Pentecost,

“In the last days,” God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your *sons and daughters* will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” (Acts 2:17) [*emphasis added*]

Further, we have all been targeted for death by an enemy who hates us and wants to hurt us, no matter our gender! None of us, male or female, can afford to stick our heads in the sand. We've got to prepare ourselves for the battle that will come to us as followers of Jesus.

Women intuitively know this and are ready to enter the struggle. The majority of those going on short-term mission trips are female because they know that there is a world of hopeless people waiting to be touched, and women are willing to do it. They're not satisfied to sit by complacently and pray for the men to get with the program. They understand well the eternal stakes, and they desire to respond with compassion. They're willing to pour their lives into it.

Look at just a few examples of the women warriors in Scripture who boldly advanced the Lord's Kingdom:

A powerful example of a woman warrior is Deborah in Judges 4-5. She governed the people of Israel, and the Lord used her in battle to rout the mighty army of Sisera the Canaanite, who was oppressing the people of Israel.

Esther is the best known example of an ambassador for God's people in the Old Testament. The canon devotes a whole book to the way that God used her to convince King Xerxes to stop a brutal genocide against the people of Israel.

In the New Testament, Priscilla exemplifies the reconciling love of a minister of the gospel. She labored alongside Paul as a "fellow worker" in evangelism among the Gentiles (Rom 16:3).

The women who followed Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were the last to leave Him at the cross (Mark 15:40, Luke 23:48-49) and the first to believe in His resurrection (Luke 24:1-12). They brought the good news first to others.

Some of the greatest spiritual warriors down through history have been women. What better example in the last century than Mother Teresa? She ventured into a nation where the wives of men who died prematurely were expected to burn themselves alive on their husband's funeral pyre, a nation full of demonic activity, and she shone Jesus' light brightly. Or look at her predecessor in the previous century, Amy Carmichael, a woman who rescued hundreds of orphans from lives as temple prostitutes.

On a trip to Peru, when engaged in spiritual warfare, the women on our team were best equipped to do it. One female leader, Mary Lou Jackson, was our most spiritually sensitive team member. She was prepared to pray for another person's healing or deliverance no matter how long it took, no matter the hour. No one could match Mary Lou for boldness in confronting the enemy. She knows how ruthless our enemy can be and she knows the authority she's been given to take him on in combat.

Women have often been on the cutting edge while men lag behind. When Paul Cho, pastor of the largest church in the world, wanted to start small group fellowships, his elders turned him down. But the women of the church helped make his vision happen. Eventually the small groups were so successful that the men of the church had to get involved!

In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul notes how Timothy's sincere faith was passed down to him from his mother and grandmother. Paul told Timothy not to allow anyone to look down upon him because he was young. Neither should young women allow their gender to be an excuse to exclude them

from fighting to usher in the Kingdom of the Lord. By both His actions and His words, Jesus showed a deep respect for the role of women in building His Kingdom. So should we.

APPLICATION

Information abounds in today's American church. You may have dozens of Christian books in your library, while dozens of your brothers in 'closed' countries share a single chapter of the Word of God. Yet information is useless without *formation*. A book on prayer, for instance, will not develop your prayer life unless you pray. The same is true with this devotional. Unless you invest the time to interact with God on these ideas and apply them in your own life, this book will ultimately be worthless both to you and the Kingdom.

Each devotional day is fairly short. The intent is for you to have plenty of time not just to read about God, but to commune with Him. This material by itself is not going to teach you anything that will last; the Lord Himself must do that. And what He desires most is not for you to read this book; it's for you to spend time with Him. Don't finish reading, breathe a prayer of thanks and call it done. Let God speak to you through Scripture by answering the questions at the end of the devotion, or through the prayer that will come from them. Allow Him to pour out His love on you and work on your heart to make you who He created you to be.

ALOE

At the end of each devotional day is an application section which includes four components: *Ask, Listen, Obey and Evaluate*. Most Christians are familiar with asking . . . use these beginning prayers as the Lord leads to get you started interacting with Him.

The "listen" section is where some people need practice. It makes sense that to have a conversation with someone, you need to both speak and listen. After you ask, make sure you give the Lord the time to respond to you! Prayer is a two-way street. God wants to commune with you.

The next step is to obey. If you call Jesus your Lord, then He can expect you to obey Him. God made it clear in the Old Testament and again in the New that He demands obedience from His people. This isn't only because He's God, although that is enough, obedience to the Lord's will leads to abundance in a Christian's life. You can count on God always being right, always having

the best in mind (Jer 29:11). Don't ask the Lord what He wants you to do unless you're willing to hear and to follow Him.

Finally, after praying and obeying, be prepared to reflect and evaluate. This is important for two reasons. First, we often fail to give praise to God for what He's done and fail to let sink in what has happened through our obedience. In doing so, we miss out on that communion with Him, as well as the faith-building that comes from recognizing He was indeed leading us and using us to advance His Kingdom. Secondly, it's unreasonable to assume that we will always hear the Lord perfectly. We're all in process, all on different parts of this journey. It's important to evaluate whether what you heard was from God, particularly if you're just beginning to really listen to the Lord and follow His daily leading. There are other competing voices, including your own, and by evaluating the effects of your obedience, you will start to become more discerning of and more confident in the Lord's voice.

I hope this process of asking, listening, obeying and evaluating becomes a habit to you, not just during *The Warrior's Journal* but in the battle for years to come.

Application Days

Day 6 of each week may take a little longer. It's set aside for more communication with God as well as an application activity based on the content of that week. Statistically speaking, most people learn best not just by reading or hearing about something, but by actually doing it. These activities may not all be new to you, but by doing them each week, you'll solidify the concepts and develop a habit of consistent availability for the Lord's work, not to mention, being His partner for whatever good thing He arranged for you that day! If you're doing this in a group, expect your leaders to ask you about what happened.

You Need a Coach

Growing in your faith is like mountain-climbing. It's possible to climb a mountain by yourself. But it's much easier with a companion. There are times when you just can't make it any further. That's when having a coach or discipler climbing with you helps. Your coach understands the cliff face you're traversing better than you do. They anchor your rope, and secure you if you slip. When you've had enough climbing, they shout encouragement up to you. They can often see things you can't and can give you perspective. They are joined with you in the endeavor – they want you to succeed.

If you tend to be independent, you may think you don't need a coach. You've learned in life that it's possible to climb on your own. But you'll find you climb a lot faster if you've got a coach. If your plan, your equipment or your strength fails, you can call for help. That's why you will see an emphasis on teamwork and on discipleship relationships in this devotional. If we aren't willing to be disciplined, we are left with trying to climb the mountain alone – a task God never gave us.

Process for One-on-One Discipleship

Ideally, you and your coach should meet regularly, at least weekly. Your coach will help you to grow by talking and praying with you about what God is doing in your life. The time you have together should be intentional. Keeping a journal will help you stay focused. Use your journal to dialogue with God, keep track of your prayer requests, and journal your thoughts. Write about how the Lord is directing you. Everyone needs accountability; as a forty-six year old, I still send conversations with God to a friend for accountability. You never “arrive.” Your discipler can coach you in how to best use the journal. When you meet, you can review what the Lord has been showing you. Here is how it can work:

1. You keep a journal with four main sections:
 - a. Prayer list
 - b. Prayer journal/dialogue with God
 - c. Bible study notes
 - d. Journal of “what I'm learning”
2. You review your journal together.
3. You answer four questions:
 - a. What has God been saying?
 - b. What have you been learning? (categories: spiritual, self, team, missions, culture)
 - c. What decisions will you make as a result?
 - d. How will you implement them?
4. Your coach holds you accountable for last week's assignments and gives you a few new ones for next week that will help you to grow.
5. You talk together.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

I recommend reading *The Art of Listening Prayer*. It is based upon the premise that God wants a personal relationship with us and that two-way communication is normal in such relationships. It helps you learn how to shift from a monologue-based prayer life to one that is truly interactive. *The Art of Listening Prayer*, a devotional, is based upon the notion that God uses two means in particular to communicate – Scripture and the still, small inner voice of the Holy Spirit.

To facilitate that interaction, **do not rush**. Each day, set aside time to fully answer the questions that you'll find in the "Application" section as an opportunity to stretch your relationship with God. Because God wants to interact with you, as you do as David did, "inquire of God" – that is, ask Him questions – He will respond.

If you are new to this, I invite you to turn to Days One and Two of *The Art of Listening Prayer* and go through the guidelines on journaling. God often uses this tool to help those who are unaccustomed to dialoguing with Him to go deeper in their communication with Him. It may feel awkward at first, but God doesn't force Himself upon us. He builds His relationship with you as you stretch out your hand in faith to Him. You'll find that ALOE acronym to be a helpful guide in your communication with the Lord. As you *Ask, Listen, Obey and Evaluate*, you'll create space for the Holy Spirit to direct your path.

Be sure to slow your life down enough to sit in silence as you listen, to write down what you perceive Him to be saying, and to follow through in obedience. Then, come back at a later time to evaluate what you have journaled. If you feel as though you've been on the sidelines, a breakthrough may be waiting for you. God wants to involve you in the process of building His Kingdom.

As you begin this study, you'll notice that each day begins with a short story about some warriors on the front lines of the faith today. There is also a suggested Bible Reading for each day.

TO SUM UP . . .

All of us, like it or not, have a bounty on our heads. None of us have a "get out of jail free" card. We've been targeted for death and thrown into a cosmic conflict. Jesus, our Lord and Master, has given us roles and a command: 'Move out!' The three roles involve different ways of dealing

with conflict. The warrior is confrontational. The ambassador is engaging. The minister is tender-hearted. To be effective, we need to master each role. But we've got to begin by getting a warrior's boldness and sense of purpose.

If you're a Christian, you have the calling already and warrior's armor is available. Now the choice is yours. Join the fray! Nothing is more exciting than putting evil to flight. If you're ready, this devotional will help take you there . . .



WEEK #1:

ZOOMING IN ON THE BATTLE SCENE

A WARRIOR'S JOURNAL

22

DAY 1: A WAR FOR SOULS IS RAGING

BIBLE READING: Ephesians 6:10-20

FAITH IN ACTION

INDONESIA – Worker Encourages Christians to Love Enemies

Amid recent violent religious clashes in Ambon, Indonesia, an Assemblies of God worker from a nearby island is teaching believers to show kindness to their enemies. Ambon, capital city of the Moluccas, has been at the heart of the islands' conflict since it began in January, 1999.

Two million people live on the 1,000 Molucca islands. Fighting between extremists from religious factions has left 10,000 dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. "As Christian refugees are provided with housing, food and education, my desire is to help them realize the importance of doing the same for members of the opposing religion," the worker said. He has made three trips to Ambon to minister to the people.

While Christians in the region think compassion for their enemies is the biblical thing to do, many have found it difficult to care about opposing groups who have also suffered loss. Political upheaval also threatens to interfere with compassion ministry. "Truckloads of jihad warriors come from all over," he said. "They are Al Qaeda-trained fighters who encourage acts of terror against Christians. Their goal is to 'cleanse' the area of anyone opposed to their religion." Religious groups now further segregate themselves – Christians wear red and others wear white. They even have separate shuttle boats to get from island to island.

The worker maintains the only way to end fighting is to offer compassion and assistance to all the hurting and displaced, from both religions. "The government can't do this, the military can't do it, and we can't expect the other religious group to do it," he said. "It's up to us as believers."

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**“IN THE PAST, EVEN WHILE SAUL WAS KING, YOU WERE THE ONE WHO
LED ISRAEL ON THEIR MILITARY CAMPAIGNS . . . ”**

1 CHRONICLES 11:2

In the time of David, Palestine was a brutal place. 1 Chronicles 20:1 tells us that it was common practice for kings to go off to war when the weather warmed up in the spring. During the winter they would repair their walls and their armor, then off they would go. Battle was a constant. Life was short and filled with mayhem.

In 2001, we saw an example of this kind of warfare in Afghanistan. America responded to the 9/11 tragedy by bombing the Al Qaeda terrorists, and the world watched as local chieftains switched their area's loyalties, depending on who seemed most powerful. They had trusted the Taliban and suffered for it.

There was one man capable of uniting them all: General Massoud. He had successfully led their military campaigns and had rebuilt their communities. He was beloved by Afghans and feared by the Taliban. But he was assassinated by the terrorists simultaneously with the attacks on America.

King David was a charismatic leader like Massoud. After Saul's death, he was the one the Israelites turned to for leadership and protection against their enemies. Saul's lack of trust in God had landed the Israelite people in a horrible situation; it was David's responsibility to regroup and prepare them to face their foes.

Such victory over his foes was a task too great for David – there were enemies all around him, and no allies. Yet he knew that God had chosen him: there was no Plan B. He was it! And so he cried out to the Lord:

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. (Psalm 17:8-9)

With such a prayer on his lips, David chose to boldly move forward into battle, not trusting in his own strength, but knowing that the God he served was powerful enough to bring victory even though he was outnumbered and faced a stronger enemy. Situations like these enabled David to proclaim, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7).

Indonesia holds up an example of Christians who are living *today* with the boldness and trust of David. They face insurmountable odds and incredible danger in order to live out and share their love for Jesus. Their enemies are using violence to oppress them, and the needs of the masses in poverty around them seem insurmountable. Yet they fight to be bold in the face of danger, lay their lives on the line, love their enemy, and share all with the poor among them. Such boldness in the midst of the struggle can only come from trusting in a God who is bigger than the mightiest of enemies – just like David did. Our Indonesian brothers have faith that the persecution they endure will build the Kingdom of God.

Although we often fail to realize it, we are in the midst of a battle just as intense as any David faced, as intense as any physical battle in the world. But Ephesians 6:12 tells us our warfare is spiritual, not physical; it is against “the powers of this dark world” that seek to blind the eyes of the world to the gospel. God gives us graphic examples of battle in Scripture in part so that we might understand how to engage in this spiritual warfare. Tiny Israel and her leaders were not so strong and powerful. In fact, those times when they trusted in their own strength, they lost. However, when they won, it was because they trusted God. Look at Gideon, in the eyes of the world he foolishly rid himself of two thirds of his men; but because he trusted God, they were victorious. We learn from these stories how to be bold, fighting out of courageous trust in the power of the Lord.

Lives are at stake around the world. Unbeliever’s eternal fate hangs in the balance as the battle rages on around us. Like David of old, like persecuted Christians all over the world today, we must trust the Lord and take on the enemy. There is no Plan B.

QUESTIONS

1. When have you personally experienced spiritual struggle? How did you deal with it?
2. When have you recently felt like you have enough problems of your own without having to worry about other people? How would God have you respond to such a feeling?
3. Do you want to be better equipped to fight your spiritual enemy? What will you do to become equipped and how will you use this to fight?
4. What can we learn from David about how to engage our enemy?
5. What lessons can we learn from the boldness and faith of our brothers in Indonesia? How will you apply them to your life in the next week?



APPLICATION

Ask: “Show me one example of the spiritual battle that is going on around me. Lord, what do you want me to do about it?”

Listen: Write down what you perceive Him to be saying.

Obey: What will you do?

Evaluate: What happens as a result?