

PREPARING FOR WAR

Victory in the spiritual war begins with knowing how God wired us for war.

Money. Power. Fame. Attention. Sex. Food. Vacations. Parties. Sports. Music. Games. Fashion. Vehicles. We've tried 'em all. And yet here we are again... searching. We really are not even sure what it is we're searching *for*, but there sure as heck must be something better than whatever *these* things have given us. But what if we were created with a purpose in mind? A purpose that gave us true peace? A purpose that brought us contentment? A purpose that kept us motivated? A purpose that inspired us to fight every day? That purpose exists; it's just not found where we've been spending all our time and energy. That purpose is found in a place where we stop feeding our desires and start following God's desires.

We were made for a relationship.

Psalm 107:9 "For He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul He fills with good things." (ESV)

We can search for peace and purpose all we want, but the search will fail until we land in a relationship with Jesus, because it is *the* only thing that will ever satisfy our spirit. We will *never* be truly satisfied outside of the supernatural peace of Jesus. Never. That's because God designed us that way!

A relationship with Jesus provides our peace and reveals our purpose.

Try to fill a diesel engine up with chocolate syrup and see if it will crank. It's not gonna happen. That's because it was designed to run on diesel fuel only. Now what if someone asked us to get that engine running efficiently? What would our first step be? Would we sit there all day and deny that diesel fuel is

the only thing that can start that engine? Would we test other substances by pouring them into the engine to see if it might turn over? Or would we follow the instructions that the engineer included and use diesel fuel?

Whether we *believe* Jesus is the only thing that can satisfy our spirit doesn't change the fact that Jesus *is* the only thing that can satisfy our spirit. Our Engineer, God the Father, said so in Psalm 107:9 (ESV) telling us that only *He* "satisfies the longing soul!" God engineered us to be satisfied only by connecting to Him. Then and only then will our engines turn over and function according to our Inventor's intent.

But how in the world do we connect to God and discover this satisfaction? What is the path to experiencing that optimal performance? John 14:6 gives us the answer as God's one and only Son Jesus tells us, "No one can come to the Father except through *Me*." We discover satisfaction when we connect to God, and we connect to God by beginning a relationship with Jesus! That relationship with Jesus – it's our diesel fuel, guys. And when we start operating according to our designer's intention, we will realize He knows what He's talking about. It makes no sense to us until we've seen it in action, but there is an unexplainable, unfathomable power that comes from Jesus' death and resurrection, and it can only be experienced through a relationship with Him. God designed us to run only on that relationship. And when it fuels us, we'll see the purpose in our design!

A lot of us right now are completely miserable. We're tired of searching. We're tired of mediocrity. We're tired of emptiness. And we're tired of not knowing what we're even doing in this life. But it wasn't meant to be this way. There *is* something more, and that something is a relationship with a man named Jesus, who endured the most gruesome killing in the history of the world, and not even *that* could keep Him in the grave!

See, guys – this isn't about religion. It's about a relationship with *the* most remarkable human being that ever walked the face of the Earth. Religion is stale and repulsive, but this relationship is satisfying and refreshing! I used to be the most skeptical of religious cynics, but now I'm the most passionate of relational fanatics...because I've experienced more than church. I've experienced Christ. And I've grasped the enormity of what our Creator did by sending His one and only Son, Jesus, to pay for our nastiest mistakes.

And that's what this entire Warrior study is about – knowing and following this real, living person who is Jesus! I know now with 100% confidence that a relationship with Jesus is *the* one element in my lifetime that has given me an indisputable, indescribable contentment. And don't miss this – that relationship with Jesus has brought peace and purpose to everything *else* in my daily life – family, friends, career, money, passions, possessions. Knowing Jesus unlocks the understanding to everything's purpose.

So how do we begin this relationship with Jesus and discover that peace and purpose? Thankfully, it's incredibly simple. Romans 10:9 says if we just confess with our mouths that “Jesus is Lord” and believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, we will be saved! And *that* is step one of this journey to becoming the Warriors that God has called us to be. When we begin a relationship with Jesus, we acknowledge that the Creator knows the most about His creation. And with that admission, we discover the truth – that we are *satisfied* only through a relationship with Jesus, and we are *fueled* to fulfill our purpose only through a relationship with Jesus.

Let's follow our Creator's instructions and go on this Warrior journey together. I'm *guaranteeing* it will be the most rewarding decision of your life.

A relationship with Jesus is our motivation in the fight for obedience.

A relationship with Jesus brings the peace and purpose that our Creator intended, but that's just the beginning. Once we cultivate that relationship, we find out that Jesus only asks one thing of us. Just one thing – to do things *His* way! In John 14:15 (ESV), Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” Jesus spells it out clearly and leaves little room for misunderstanding, guys. A real love for Him results in obedience! And this is what *Warrior* is all about – fighting to know Jesus and fighting to intentionally align every meticulous detail to His manual. And it is indeed a fight! Galatians 5:17 talks about this war and how “the sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants.” It goes on to say that “these two forces are constantly fighting against each other so that [we] are not free to carry out [our] good intentions.” The war exists, and every approach will lead to defeat...except for knowing Jesus.

Men – a relationship with Jesus is the source of our emergence as Warriors, generating both the *desire* and the *power* to fight for Biblical obedience. Without that relationship fueling us, we'll have zero motivation to do what God engineered us to do. That's where far too many of us are right now... we have no relationship, so we have no desire to fight! And we can't win a war without having a motivation to fight.

In order for us to get that motivation, we must go to the ultimate Motivator – a *man's man* who died a brutal death for each one of us. A man who is such a beast that He delivered the ultimate smack down on the enemy and straight up dominated death in the process! A man who Revelation 1:18 tells us robbed the tomb of its power and now “hold[s] the keys of death and the grave!” His name is Jesus! And He decisively won the most crucial war in history even while He was dead! There is nothing more motivating than that. Jesus is a man who is stronger *dead* than Satan is *alive*! It satisfies my soul as a man when I think of how ridiculously tough and powerful our Savior is! Warriors – we serve the greatest superhero of all time! And *that* is some motivation to fight for obedience!

We need the Holy Spirit.

Micah 3:8 “But as for me, I am filled with power – with the Spirit of the Lord.”

This relationship with Jesus...it's not boring, guys. Or at least it shouldn't be! And if it invokes no emotion, no gratefulness, no excitement, no energy, then we haven't tapped into the most powerful gift that God gave us for life here on Earth – His Holy Spirit! Everybody freak out now because we just mentioned the phrase “Holy Spirit!” Sadly, it's a term that carries a negative, and often-times strange, stigma in culture. We've disregarded this part of God's Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – because it's the part we can't wrap our minds around. We can talk about the Father and the Son, but we don't want anything to do with some mysterious spirit that we can't envision! Unfortunately, we're eliminating the most enjoyable part of our everyday relationship with Jesus!

The Holy Spirit empowers our spirit.

Guys – the Holy Spirit is the vehicle that allows us to *feel* Jesus’ supernatural power here on Earth. It isn’t a creepy ghost who follows us or some fist to the head that knocks us down during church services. The Holy Spirit is a peaceful presence who empowers us! Let’s just be real for a moment and say what we’re all thinking: “The Holy Spirit logically makes no sense to us!” We can try to comprehend or describe it all we want, but it’s something that can only be experienced! And in order to experience the indescribable peace and power of the Holy Spirit, all we have to do is have faith that it’s real and ask God to show us! It’s that simple.

But a fair warning: Warriors – once we experience it, we’ll have an epiphany. Everything clicks...in a good way. It defies logic and surpasses human comprehension. Philippians 4:7 confirms my experience with the Holy Spirit saying, “God’s peace...exceeds anything we can understand.” It’s pointless trying to put it into words, so I will stop. When we ask God for His Holy Spirit, it is far from creepy, strange, or off-putting. In fact, there’s no greater feeling than when God’s presence is around us. I’m just going to tell it like it is: We all want to feel the way the Holy Spirit makes us feel. Period. I guarantee that if you could have one day when you experience what it feels like to have the Holy Spirit’s peace and presence over you, it would trump any other thrill or emotional satisfaction you’ve experienced.

The Holy Spirit is our fuel in the fight for obedience.

Guys – it is impossible and exhausting to obey God’s Word through pure human effort. There is zero chance we will win the war and experience the peace we’re all looking for if we don’t have the Holy Spirit to give us the power to obey. In fact, God specifically gave us His Holy Spirit so it would be possible for us *to* obey. If we were relating it to watching a football game, the Holy Spirit is our coach, star player, helmet, pads, playbook, and hydration wrapped into one! He is the presence that leads, inspires, empowers, protects, directs, energizes, and ultimately dominates our spiritual opponent! And guys – we can’t win without His presence.

We were wired for war.

Ephesians 6:13 “Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will be standing firm.”

We can try to ignore any truth we choose, but it won’t make it untrue. And the truth is there’s a spiritual war going on at this very moment for your thoughts as well as mine. We already read about that war in Galatians 5:17 and how those two forces – the flesh and the spirit – are constantly battling each other to control our minds. Ignoring this reality inevitably means our spirit is already defeated.

A war exists that challenges our spirit every moment of every day.

In the context of our football analogy, if a game has been scheduled between our team and our toughest opponent, and we choose not to show up, that’s a guaranteed loss for our team. It’s called a forfeit, and unfortunately that’s where a lot of men are today spiritually. Our opponent is deceptively smart and intimidatingly strong. The environment on the battlefield is uncomfortably hot and humid. Not to mention, things can get challenging, even painful at times, when we get up and fight for our team. We elect to sit out instead. After all, it’s just easier to ignore the battle entirely! And that’s inherently the problem...here we are in the only war that matters, and we’re sitting out because it’s hard to fight. It’s inconvenient to fight. Meanwhile, God has given us the assignment in Colossians 3:2 (NIV) urging us to “set [our] minds on things above, not on earthly things.” But we aren’t concerned with that. We’d rather forfeit.

Let’s be real. It is a brutal challenge for us to set our minds on things that are unseen, because there are so many things that we *can* see that are *distracting* us! Those are “earthly things,” and it takes a relentlessly dedicated effort to be steadily focused on the “things above.” We’re talking incessant monitoring and filtration. And this isn’t for the faint of heart. That’s *exactly* why there are so few Warriors on the field of spiritual battle. The assignment is waiting. And that assignment might be overwhelming at times, but God made us for this war! Luke 10:19 says, “Look, I have given you authority over all the

power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you.” That pumps me up! It makes me want to let out my manliest roar and go rough somebody up! The Creator of the Universe, who holds all power and truth in His words, just said, “Men – I’m giving you authority to *crush* the enemy, and by the way – *nothing* can hurt you.” That is some *serious* authority!

Men – it’s time to quit relaxing and be alert. It’s time to unite and engage in violent, spiritual combat to take back the identity of the Warriors we were created to be! It’s time for us to raise the banner of victory over the enemy and stop living for our selfish cravings and addictions! It’s time to start shouting the motto of 2 Corinthians 10:5 and skewer every thought as it enters our minds to make sure it pleases God! It’s time to quit settling for worldly comfort and embrace the discomfort our flesh feels when we deny ourselves of earthly pleasures! This is what we are wired to do, and when we do it, we come alive in a way we never thought possible!

The war demands our commitment to fight for obedience.

Fighting this war for obedience is anything but easy. It takes an unyielding, unrelenting commitment. And that commitment is unwavering and immovable. It is unaffected by circumstances. It is unselfish. It is unglamorous. It is the epitome of loyalty. It is consistent and unwilling to compromise under pressure. And it is the vessel by which God makes us Warriors. Commitment is absent from Christian manhood today. And soon it will be extinct if we don’t make a concrete decision that we will stand firm in the fight for obedience as Ephesians 6:13 says! Warriors – let’s bring commitment back to the front lines of battle.

We were created for excellence.

Daniel 6:3 “Daniel was preferred...because an excellent spirit was in him.” (KJV)

Our world has redefined what a man is, portraying us as lazy, lukewarm, dishonest, inconsistent, apathetic, feminine, filthy...you fill in the blank. Society has reduced us to these animalistic beings that exist only for our own hedonistic pleasures. And sadly, we’ve bought into this pathetic lie of mere existence and mediocrity. If given the choice between excellence and comfort,

we'll choose comfort any day of the week. Comfort is why we exist, and that's why excellence has become extinct...because God forbid we experience some discomfort!

Excellence is painful, but it maximizes our potential.

Excellence requires discipline, and discipline brings pain. The Bible says so. Hebrews 12:11 acknowledges that “no discipline is enjoyable while it’s happening,” and that “it’s painful.” We’re going to reference this verse frequently in our journey to become Warriors because there’s pain on the path to excellence! And there’s no shortcut! Warriors – excellence is marked by attention to even the finest detail, and it’s achieved through a painful discipline that will often exhaust 100% of our effort. And this is woefully uncommon among men because most of us dread discipline and fear pain when God intended for us to embrace them. Relating this to our football analogy – excellence emerges in the last round of sprints during two-a-day practices during the most unbearably hot summer day. During the moment when no one is watching, our legs are burning, our breathing is labored, and we feel like the circumstances are so overwhelming that we can’t possibly give another ounce of effort, we find a way to set ourselves apart from the others and do what we are asked to do. It is mentally the toughest thing we do, but it’s the introductory point for God’s abundance.

Excellence is our focus in the fight for obedience.

Excellence is defined by *complete* alignment with God’s way. It isn’t partial. It isn’t most. It is whole, and it is thorough. And excellence allows God to utilize us to the fullest. And when we minimize our attachment to “earthly things,” we maximize our purpose for the “things above.” Excellence optimizes potential. We see that in Daniel 6:3 (KJV) where Daniel was “preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him.” Warriors – God wants to escalate us to greater places, positions, and purposes, but He’s waiting on our complete alignment. In essence, our excellence is the permission God needs before He will enlarge our territory and increase our impact.

When we hold onto any thought, habit, or pleasure that is even the slightest bit out of line with God’s Word, we relinquish the ability to be used to our greatest potential. God knows how detrimental sin is to our useful-

ness, and that's why He tells us to flee it. Not just some of it...but all of it. And this difference between "some" and "all" defines the toughest part of being a Warrior. When the "all" becomes our fixation, we become true Warriors. Because even if we have an intimate relationship with Jesus, are filled by the Holy Spirit's power, and are committed to the fight – there will *still* be times when it is hard to make the right choices...because the world is enticingly overwhelming at times. But those moments are when our willful focus on excellence helps us make the right choice and follow the Holy Spirit's lead to flee temptation.

We are encouraged throughout God's Word to be proactive about excellence. In Hebrews 12:1, we are urged to "strip off" *every* sin that trips us up. Then in Galatians 5:16, we are instructed to "let" the Holy Spirit guide our lives so that we won't do what our sinful nature craves. Notice how these verses use verbs that require *our* action, not God's. Only we have the power to "strip off" every sin, and only we have the ability to "let" the Holy Spirit guide our lives. God can do everything for us except make the choice. That's what free will is. And without excellence as our focus and knowing that our choices have impact, we will inevitably use our free will to choose the comfortable option that satisfies self. We need to be reminded that our choices matter, and it's with right choice after right choice that we cultivate excellence. That's when we will experience victory in the spiritual war and a tangible increase of peace and purpose. And to be honest, I'm just tired of giving up true peace and purpose for momentary pleasures that leave me miserable the rest of the time. I'm tired of floating through life and blending in with culture. I'm tired of watching our generation of men put one hand in earthly things and the other hand in the things above. I'm ready to transcend the status quo, and if it requires some pain, so be it!

SUMMARY

+ God made us to be satisfied only by a relationship with Jesus, which is our motivation to fight the spiritual battle.

+ God designed us to be empowered only by the Holy Spirit, which serves as our fuel to fight the spiritual battle.

+ God wired us for war, but the war demands our commitment to be victorious in the fight.

+ God wired us for excellence, and excellence must be our focus to be victorious in the fight.

RESPONSE

God, thank You for wiring me the way that You did. I may try to find satisfaction in the world, but I recognize that You didn't design me to be fulfilled by earthly things. And only through a relationship with Your Son, Jesus, can I experience the peace and the purpose You uniquely placed on my life.

I may not completely understand what a real relationship with You looks like yet, but I choose to believe that Your Holy Spirit is real and it gives me access to a supernatural peace and power that leads me to be a Warrior and fight for Your purpose.

And Lord, although I might not fully comprehend the concept of a spiritual war, I do acknowledge that there are countless choices every day that have massive impact on my life and the lives of others. God, I need Your unmatched, unexplainable power to fulfill me so I can position myself for daily victory in the spiritual war.

I want to get to a place of commitment and excellence, but I need Your help. Jesus, begin moving my spirit right now so I can become the Warrior You created me to be.