

Have you heard the expression “a hill worth dying on”? Perhaps you have sometimes been encouraged to “choose your battles wisely”. What about “winning the battle but losing the war”?

When we hear the word “battle” – we often think of something like this [*image or movie clip – plenty available, but you may wish to consider what kind is most suitable for your group*] – like a blockbuster movie where the forces of good and evil are locked in an epic struggle, where the noble hero leads their troops in a desperate last stand, at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour a miracle happens and victory is won!

But battles don’t happen like that in real life – or do they? The Bible makes it clear that there *is* a war going on all around us. Ephesians 6:12 says:

*“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)*

That sounds pretty epic to me! How do we deal with this conflict? Before we jump on our horse and charge into the fray here are a few things to consider:

1. Winning one doesn’t automatically win the other.

Military history has plentiful examples which show us that it is possible to win some battles, but lose the war (hence the proverb!). But the same history shows it’s possible to lose some battles and win the war. What does this mean for us when it comes to *spiritual warfare*?

2. The actual **war** – the fight against sin, evil and death – has already been won.

Those evil forces? Jesus took them all on and defeated them once and for all time, by His death and resurrection. Hebrews 10:12-14 describes it like this:

*Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it! Then he sat down right beside God and waited for his enemies to cave in. It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people. By that single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process. (The Message)*

This is the good news of the Gospel! Jesus has already claimed the decisive victory and offers freedom to anyone who accepts Him. His reward is our redemption, and when we belong to Christ, we’re on the final winning side. Now – while that is the ultimate, triumphant end of the story, it’s not yet the end of our own stories. Just like in military history, a defeated foe may try to keep fighting

3. We face **an ongoing battle** of a different kind.

We don’t have to ‘overcome’ our enemy – Jesus has already done that. But we do each have our own personal battle: **the one against self**. God has granted each of His children free will – the right and the responsibility to make choices – and so, we must choose how we manage our self. Not an easy task, as the Apostle Paul found:

*“I’m a mystery to myself, for I want to do what is right, but end up doing what my moral instincts condemn. And if my behaviour is not in line with my desire, my conscience still confirms the excellence of the law. And now I realize that it is no longer my true self doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin in my humanity. For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but will-power is not enough to accomplish it. My lofty desires to do what is good are dashed when I do the things I want to avoid.” (Romans 7:15-19, TPT)*

While this may seem like challenge enough, we also live in a broken, imperfect world. And our defeated foe is still trying to make as much trouble as he can, especially for those who have accepted Jesus. The enemy knows he can’t beat us but he attempts to add unpleasantness and pain to our ongoing personal battles against our selves.

How can *this* epic battle be won? Ironically, the way to victory comes through our surrender. Not surrendering to our self-nature, but surrendering to our Saviour so His divine nature at work in us triumphs. And this is one of the paradoxes of faith: the weak are strong (2 Corinthians 12:10); the first will be last, and the last will be first (Matthew 20:16); the one who gains their life will lose it – and the one who loses it will find it (Matthew 16:24-26). When we ‘lose’, we win!

So what does this “losing to win” look like in our daily life in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia?

It's all about those choices. It may be played out in a thousand small moments every day, when we can either skirmish with our broken, sinful self, or kill it. When we use our free will to choose Christ, our imperfect self is put to death. Galatians 5:16-23 paints a vivid picture of the ways our choices can direct us toward two very different outcomes in this battle.

*[it is a long passage – can read or project the whole thing or key verses, particularly vs. 19-21 in comparison to 22-23. NLT, Message and The Passion Translation are all descriptive.]*

A ‘hill worth dying on’ can suggest that not all hills are worth the sacrifice. It implies some battles don't matter as much as others, and can be given up. Yet when it comes to our daily small choices, each one is actually very important. God doesn't want us to be a little bit broken and a little bit fixed – He wants us to be completely whole.

While our death to our old imperfect self is an ongoing process, at each ‘little hill’ our choices lead us more toward wholeness when we choose Jesus:

- When we choose to *love* Him, our choices begin to change our heart and sharpen our conscience;
- When we choose to *follow* Him, our choices lead us away from actions and behaviours that are not like His;
- When we choose to *imitate* Him, our choices begin to make us more like Him, by the power of His Holy Spirit;
- When we choose to *obey* Him, our choices inform our old sinful nature that we no longer have to do what it wants!

Jesus believed that Calvary was the ultimate hill worth dying on – one that encompassed all possible hills! He's already won that final victory on behalf of every one of us. What are we prepared to do to become the people He invites us to be? Let's reflect on the ‘hills’ in our lives – the battle grounds of our choices.

#### Reflection/response options:

- Watch *Be Intentional* (Right Now Media)
- Reflect on Galatians 5 passage + instrumental music
- List of possible songs provided in resource list

#### Galatians 5:16-23:

*As you yield freely and fully to the dynamic life and power of the Holy Spirit, you will abandon the cravings of your self-life.<sup>17</sup> For your self-life craves the things that offend the Holy Spirit and hinder him from living free within you! And the Holy Spirit's intense cravings hinder your old self-life from dominating you! So then, the two incompatible and conflicting forces within you are your self-life of the flesh and the new creation life of the Spirit.*

*<sup>18</sup> But when you are brought into the full freedom of the Spirit of grace, you will no longer be living under the domination of the law, but soaring above it!*

*<sup>19</sup> The cravings of the self-life are obvious: Sexual immorality, lustful thoughts, pornography, <sup>20</sup> chasing after things instead of God, manipulating others, hatred of those who get in your way, senseless arguments, resentment when others are favoured, temper tantrums, angry quarrels, only thinking of yourself, being in love with your own opinions, <sup>21</sup> being envious of the blessings of others, murder, uncontrolled addictions, wild parties, and all other similar behaviour.*

*Haven't I already warned you that those who use their “freedom” for these things will not inherit the kingdom realm of God!*

*<sup>22-23</sup> But the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit within you is divine love in all its varied expressions:*

*joy that overflows, peace that subdues, patience that endures, kindness in action, a life full of virtue, faith that prevails, gentleness of heart, and strength of spirit.*

*Never set the law above these qualities, for they are meant to be limitless.*