

BIBLE BOOTCAMP

RICHARD MAYHUE

SPIRITUAL BATTLES IN THE BIBLE: AND WHAT THEY CAN TEACH YOU



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What they can Teach you*

Richard Mayhue

CHRISTIAN FOCUS

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Scripture quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from the New American Standard Bible, © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977.

© Richard L. Mayhue
ISBN 1-845500-105-5

Published in 1999
as *Fight the Good Fight*
and reprinted in 2005

by

Christian Focus Publications,
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Great Britain.

www.christianfocus.com

Previously published in 1987 as
A Christian's Survival Guide
by Victor Books.

Cover design by Jonny Sherlock

Printed & bound by
Nørhaven Paperback A/S, Denmark

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INTRODUCTION

My special friend John MacArthur uniquely described to a group of pastors his progressive realization that the ministry was tough. 'At first,' he said, 'the ministry was just plain fun. So much so, I could not understand why so many men struggled.' Continuing on, John described how it later became hard work to prepare two new messages a week and oversee a growing church. 'Finally I discovered the ministry was an intense spiritual battle with Satan over the souls of people.'

Life is no different. The details of daily living involve warfare against a number of enemies like Satan, circumstances, other people, and even ourselves. My experience decades ago in Vietnam continually reminds me that, realistically, life is just like a war zone. Everyone is shooting at me and I am fighting like mad to stay alive.

Years ago I taught a group of young boys about the great heroes of God in the Bible. I concluded by asking, 'Wouldn't you like to be a spiritual giant for God too?' Everyone shouted, 'Yes!' except the boy standing next to

me who replied 'Naw, I don't want to have anything to do with that stuff.'

They hadn't prepared me in seminary for that kind of response. So I answered with the most intelligent words I could think of, 'Why not?' The boy instantly shot back, 'Because the bigger they are, the harder they fall.'

He had a good point. Life is a battle and the casualty rate is high. Just as I was about to panic over how to recover the lesson, a Scripture came to mind. 'The steps of a man are established by the LORD, and He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong, because the LORD is the One who holds his hand' (Ps. 37:23-24).

My young friend, the skeptic, became a believer when he realized that God would be on his side. If he fell, God would be there to help him recover. I've never forgotten that episode because it so poignantly describes the Christian life.

Listen to Jahaziel who delivered a striking message to King Jehoshaphat. 'Do not fear or be dismayed ... for the battle is not yours but God's' (2 Chron. 20:15). By viewing the Christian life from this eternal perspective and by fighting on earth according to God's battle plan, any Christian can be on the winning side and successfully fight life's daily battles to spiritual victory, like Paul (2 Tim. 4:7).

In living out our Christianity, there is no better place to go than the Bible for help in developing a strategy to be on God's winning side. Romans 15:4 strikes this chord: 'For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.'

We shall look back to earlier times, to men and women who fought the battle of life. Some lost, some were wounded, while others tasted victory without knowing the agony of defeat or the pain of being wounded. Some were winners; some losers. But they all fought battles – there were no exceptions. Their enemies remain our opponents today. These Old Testament warriors teach us contemporary lessons loaded with twenty-first century reality.

Some combatants, like Judas or Ananias and Sapphira, looked like certain winners but lost. Others, like Matthew and Paul, occupied 'the loser's circle' for the first part of their lives but later finished as notable victors.

Solomon, Jonah, Eve, and Saul faced the same enemies that we do today. They possessed all of the resources to conquer their foes. Sadly, the Bible reports that they lost. These people, who walked on feet of clay as we do, serve to warn us that victory is not certain unless we stay close by God's side and obey God's Word.

Others fell while fighting but later recovered to win. Their ranks include Elijah, Samson, Habakkuk, and Moses. They stumbled and fell, but in the midst of an awkward tumble, they reached out for God and he caught them before they crashed. Each life shouts 'There is hope!' to you who are down but not yet out.

By God's grace some fought and never fell. This enviable crew numbers Joseph, Job, Ruth, and Daniel among their kind. It's possible to win without being wounded. These heroes of the faith encourage us to enter the battle and to keep fighting the good fight of faith for God's glory (1 Tim. 6:12).

I once read that the only way to lose is to quit. If I could write the epitaph of our lives, it would read, 'They won by failing ... to quit.'

David Hubbard exactly captures the spirit of this book:

The program of God through history is like a relay race. Let one runner drop out and the whole team loses. Let one runner lose the baton and the whole team is eliminated. Let one runner break the rules and the whole team is disqualified. The work of no runner counts until every runner does his share and the anchor man has hit the tape at the finish line.

The phrase 'let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus' is the key. The idea is clear. There are lots of distractions as we run. Bypaths beckon us; false goals attract us; competition discourages us; opposition causes us to falter. Jesus, however, a tried and trusted leader who blazed the trail of faith by His own obedience and perseverance and who finished the course in a burst of glory is both our guide and our goal. We look away from everything else to Him, if we want to run well.¹

Let's pray together that we will fight the good fight of faith and run well to the end for God's glory and thus be on the winning side.

'Contains a great deal of practical application for this age and culture... recommended for your reading enjoyment and teaching.'

TIM LAHAYE

'...for those of you looking to learn how to improve your moral decision making from characters in the Bible'

CHRISTIANITY MAGAZINE

'Whatever passage you choose from the Old Testament those writings can teach you things right now! Richard Mayhue does so superbly... It is suitable for a wide readership and particularly for young Christians.'

EVANGELICAL MAGAZINE OF WALES

Today's fast-paced society beguiles people to do what they can get away with. The concept of 'moral fibre' is considered laughable, yet admired in films and yearned for in relationships. How do you develop real moral character? Our TV's say 'send them to Boot Camp!'. Richard Mayhue helps us achieve that spiritually by looking at character building examples in the Bible.

Warning: Some failed to win. Solomon, Jonah, Eve and Saul.

Hope: Some fell but recovered while fighting. Elijah, Samson, Habakkuk and Moses.

Encouragement: Some fought to victory. Joseph, Job, Ruth and Daniel.

Wisdom: Gaining God's perspective – after basic training it's out into the battlefield.

Developing moral courage is important because what you are is even more important than what you know when you face unforeseen circumstances.

RICHARD MAYHUE is Executive Vice-President of The Master's College and Seminary in Los Angeles, California. His other books include

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	ISBN 1-84550-105-5
www.christianfocus.com	
BIC - HRC/BSG/CHA CPSG - CLW/CLF/PGR	9 781845 501051