

God's Battle



SALLY MICHAEL

"A theologically rich resource for parents and pastors. . . I highly recommend it." —Josh Mulvihill

God's Battle



Making HIM Known

God's Battle

God's Names

God's Promise

God's Providence

God's Wisdom

God's Battle

BY SALLY MICHAEL



P U B L I S H I N G
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Dedicated to
Kathi Westlund,
beloved friend, true sister,
and faithful prayer warrior.

May you continue to fight the fight of faith
as you labor in prayer for those you love
and for God's kingdom purposes.

Galatians 6:9



I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

—2 Timothy 4:7–8

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Preface

*Finally, be strong in the Lord
and in the strength of his might.
—Ephesians 6:10*

Everyone is in a battle. Either you are fighting against God as an unbeliever, or you are a believer and God is helping you fight the fight of faith. Joining the fight of faith is a work of grace. Completing the fight of faith is also a work of grace, for it is God Himself who works in us so that we persevere in faith.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

God's Battle is about persevering to the end. To persevere, one must fight. In a battle there is no room for passivity. There is no room for compromise. There is no vacation from the battle. You must fight . . . and you must keep on fighting. And you must never give up, because in Jesus there is the wonderful promise of victory and an eternal home.

If you are not fighting the battle of faith, you may not be a child of God. May God in His mercy save your soul. If you are fighting the battle, God has given you ample weapons to fight the good fight, and He is working in you. Do not be afraid of the enemy; do not grow weary in the battle; do not despair of the fight . . .

for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

We are not alone in the fight of faith. God Himself fights with us to keep us persevering in faith until the end. And God is always victorious.

In the pages of this book there is a battle strategy to fight for your faith. May you, the parent, fight well, and in turn encourage your child to fight well. May you finish your race well and fight the good fight to the end. May we all trust in Jesus to the end and say when we see Him face to face,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

(2 Timothy 4:7)

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great; and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth;
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.

—"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," Martin Luther, 1529;
trans. Frederick H. Hedge, 1853

Introduction

How to Use This Book

This book was written to give parents an opportunity to present solid truth to their children and to encourage real-life application of that truth.

Relational

Children receive more encouragement to learn when truth is presented by a trusted individual. Your positive, relational parent-child commitment will be a real benefit when you sit down together to read this book. Your time together over the Word should be positive, affirming, and loving.

Interactive

There is a greater impact when an individual *discovers* truth instead of just hearing it presented. Many questions have been incorporated into the text of this book to encourage your child to wonder and think critically. The process of discovery will be circumvented if you don't give your child adequate time to think and respond. After asking a question, wait for a response. If your child has difficulty, ask the question in a different way or give a few hints.

Questions and responses can be springboards for more questions and discovery as you interact with your child's mind and heart. The Holy Spirit is the real teacher, so depend on Him to give both you and your child thoughts and truths to explore together, and to bring the necessary understanding. Take the time to work through each story at a leisurely pace—giving time for interaction and further dialogue. The goal should be to get the material into the child, not just to get the child through the material.

Understandable

These stories have been written with attention given to explaining difficult or potentially new concepts. Some of these concepts may take time for your child to digest. Allow your child to ponder new truths. Read the story more than once, allowing the truth to be better understood and integrated into your child's theological framework. At times, have your child read parts of the lesson, giving an opportunity for visual learning.

Because vocabulary can be child-specific, define the particular words foreign to your child. Retell difficult sections in familiar wording, and ask questions to be sure your child understands the truth being taught.

Theological

More than just acquainting your child with an understanding of spiritual warfare, this book is building a foundation of biblical theology for your child. As your child begins to correctly understand who God is, who Satan is, the spiritual battle every person is in, and the weapons of victory God gives His children, your child will begin to see the reality of the spiritual world and the beauty of God and His ways.

Because the Word of God has convicting and converting power, Bible texts are quoted word for word in some parts. Some of these verses may be beyond the child's understanding, so you may want to explain unfamiliar words or thoughts. Even though clear comprehension may be difficult, hearing the Word itself is a means that the Holy Spirit often uses to encourage faith in your child (Romans 10:17). Do not minimize the effectual influence of God's Word in the tender souls of children.

Since the Word of God is living and active, allow the child to read the actual Bible verses as much as possible. Also, encourage your child to memorize some of the verses so he or she can meditate on them at other times.

The gospel is presented numerous times throughout the book. Use this as an opportunity to share God’s work of grace in your life, and to converse with your child about his or her spiritual condition. Be careful not to confuse spiritual interest with converting faith, and take care to avoid giving premature assurances. Fan the flames of gospel-inspired conviction and tenderness toward the sacrificial love of Jesus without prematurely encouraging your child to pray “the sinner’s prayer.”¹

Application

Understanding the truth is essential, but understanding alone is insufficient. Truth must also be embraced in the heart and acted upon in daily life. Often, children cannot make the connection between a biblical truth and real-life application, so you, the parent, must help bridge the gap.

Consider the following quotation by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

We must always put things in the right order, and it is Truth first. . . . The heart is always to be influenced through the understanding—the mind, then the heart, then the will. . . . But God forbid that anyone should think that it ends with the intellect. It starts there, but it goes on. It then moves the heart and finally the man yields his will. He obeys, not grudgingly or unwillingly, but with the whole heart. The Christian life is a glorious perfect life that takes up and captivates the entire personality.²

Spend a few days or even a week on each story. Reread the story, discuss the truths, and follow the suggestions in the Learning to Trust God section. Most

1. Some excellent resources for parents regarding the salvation of children can be found at www.children-desiring-god.org, including a booklet titled *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel* and two seminars from the 2007 Children Desiring God conference, *How Great a Salvation—“Leading Children to a Solid Faith”* and *“Presenting the Gospel to Children.”*

2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 61–62.

importantly, help your child to see that God is who He says He is, and help him or her to act in response to the truth. Point out God's involvement in daily life and thank Him for being true to His Word.

Prayer

Ultimately, our efforts are effective only if the Holy Spirit breathes on our teaching and quickens it to the heart. Pray not only before going through the stories, but also in the succeeding days, that your child would see the beauty of God and His ways and respond to Him in faith.

Our Hearts

Has your mother or father ever fixed something that was broken? What was it? People can fix a lot of things: flat tires, a shirt with a missing button, and lawn mowers. Sometimes doctors can even fix really important things, like a weak heart.

But there is a heart problem no doctor can ever fix—a very, very serious heart problem. It can't be fixed with medicine or an operation . . . and every single person except Jesus is born with this heart problem. That includes Abraham in the Bible, King David, Mary and Joseph, your grandparents, your parents . . . and you.

The heart with the problem is not the one that pumps blood through our bodies. But it is the heart the Bible talks about, which is your deepest thoughts and feelings and the things you love most. This is what the Bible says about the heart:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
(Genesis 6:5)

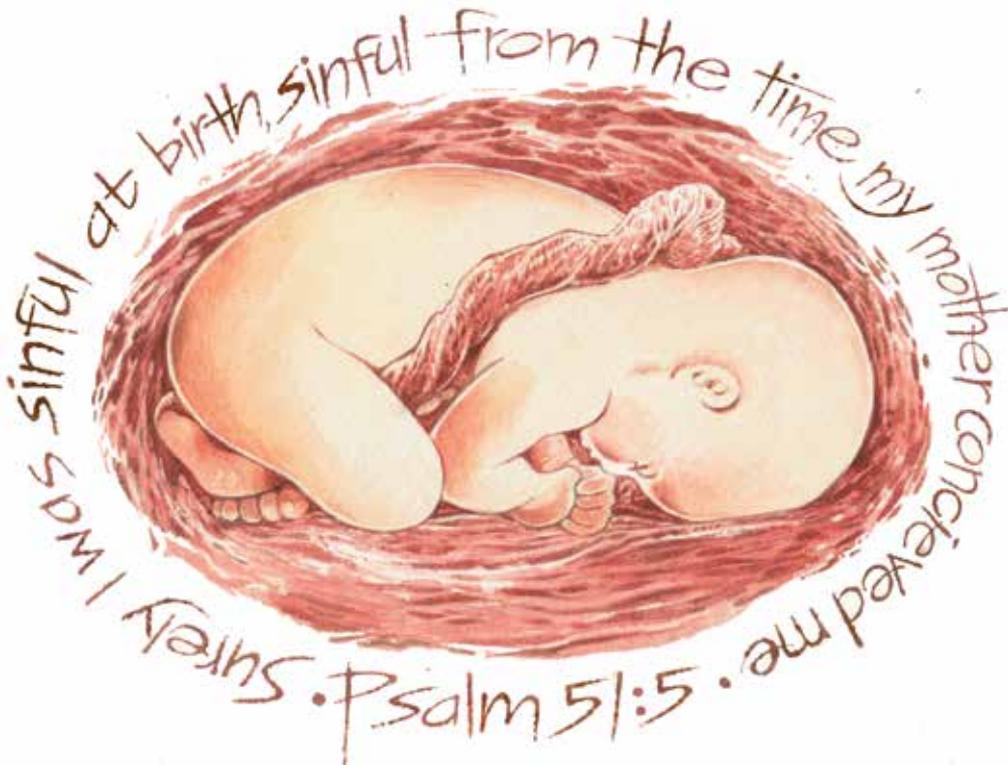
What words in this verse show you how bad the heart is? “Every,” “only,” “continually.” Is the heart just a little bit bad or very seriously evil? It is very seriously evil, and this very serious heart problem makes us turn away from God. It keeps us from loving and doing what we should. It makes us love sin and struggle to do what is right. Our hearts don't naturally love being generous, or being more concerned about others than about ourselves, or being told we can't get our own way.

Do you know how our hearts got this way? They got this way the same way King David's heart got this way.

Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5 NIV)

When David was born, and even before he was born, he had a sinful heart. And we did too. Every person is born with a sinful heart; we can't change that. Just like we can't change what color of eyes we have, how tall we will be, or what we will be good at, we can't change the kind of heart we have.

Some things become damaged—like new tennis shoes worn in the mud, or a torn shirt, or a rusty bike. But not our hearts. They came with a sin problem.



If something is dirty, you can wash it. If it is torn, you can sew it. If a screw is missing, you can put in a new screw. If something is dented, you can pound out the dent. But there is nothing we can do to fix our sinful hearts.

That is really BAD NEWS! It is bad news because God hates sin and cannot accept anyone with a sinful heart. This is what the Bible says about God:

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil
and cannot look at wrong . . . (Habakkuk 1:13)

There is no evil in God. He is pure—good and right. He cannot even stand to look at sin! With our sinful hearts, we cannot have a friendship with God. We have no right to enter heaven. Instead, we deserve eternal punishment in hell. This is *horrible* news for sinners who cannot fix their sinful hearts. This should make us all very sad, scared, and upset.

But there is more to the story. There is also GOOD NEWS! Very, very, very good news. It is good news that should make us full of joy, unafraid, and peaceful.

Do you want to know the good news? To know the good news, you need to keep reading this book. See if you can discover the very, very, very good news . . . the best news ever!



LEARNING TO TRUST GOD

- ✦ Read Genesis 6:5–8, 11–22. What is the bad news in this Bible story? What shows you that there is good news?
- ✦ Read Romans 3:23. How have you sinned? What does it mean to “fall short of the glory of God”?
- ✦ *Activity:* Take a glass of milk and add some dirt to it. Would you drink it? Why not? Can you take the dirt out of the milk? How is the dirty milk like our hearts? How does this experiment help you to understand Habakkuk 1:13? Why can't God accept sinful man?

Our Actions Come from Our Hearts

When you cut an orange, what kind of smell comes out? Does an onion smell come out of an orange? No. Where does an onion smell come from? An onion. An orange smell comes from an orange, and an onion smell comes from an onion. What comes out is determined by what is inside.

It's the same way with our hearts. What comes out is determined by what is inside. This is what the Bible says about it:

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45)

Good things come from good hearts; bad things come from bad hearts. What we do and say comes from our hearts. Taking the biggest cookie, the best seat, or the most markers comes from what is in the heart. Taking the small cookie, or giving someone else the best seat, or sharing your markers also comes from what is in the heart.

See how you do on this quiz about the heart:

- What is in the heart that makes a person take the best for himself? (maybe selfishness or greed)
- What is in the heart when a person helps someone who falls down? (maybe kindness or compassion)
- When a person calls another person a name or hits someone else, what is in his heart? (maybe meanness or jealousy or anger)

Most often what we do and say comes from what is deep in our hearts. Sometimes we don't even realize what is in our hearts. But what is in our hearts affects what we say and do.

People with good hearts *most often* do and say good things. Even though sometimes people with good hearts do bad things, *most of the time* they do and say good things. People with bad hearts will do and say bad things. It is very hard for us not to follow what our hearts want.

Do you think a person can make himself do what is right when in his heart he wants to do what is wrong? Let's find out!



Think about a rubber band, or go get a rubber band if you have one. Can you stretch it out and make it longer? Yes, you can. By pulling on it and holding it tightly you can make it longer. But what happens when you let go? The rubber band goes back to being smaller. It goes back to what it most naturally is. For how long can you stretch the rubber band? Can you stretch it forever? No, at some point you let go of it.

Our hearts are the same way. We can make ourselves do good things we don't really want to do—it is like making the rubber band longer. We are pulling our hearts away from what is wrong to make them go the right way. But sooner or later, we get tired and give up. We let go.

When a person's heart is wrong, he can force himself to do what is right, but sooner or later he will snap back to do what his heart really wants to do. His heart keeps pulling him back to what is wrong. He just isn't strong enough to keep doing what is right.

It is not enough to try to *do* the right thing. That doesn't last. We have all been born with a sinful heart.

No one is good except God alone. (Mark 10:18)¹

One of the things we need is a new heart, a heart that loves what is right. We need a heart that loves God and His ways and that *wants* to do and say good things. But how can we get a new heart? We can't buy it at the store or get it for Christmas. We can't make one or fix the one we have.

We are back to the BAD NEWS: our sinful hearts cannot be accepted by a holy God. Trying to do what is right does not make us have a good heart.

The Bible tells us about a man who thought he was good. He thought the good things he did would get him into heaven. We don't know his name; the Bible calls him the rich young ruler. He told Jesus that he kept all the commandments—did

1. If your child wonders why the Bible says that God alone is good and also talks about the good person in Luke 6:45, explain that Jesus can give people a *measure* of His goodness.

the right things. But Jesus knew about the man's heart. He knew that he didn't love God most of all, even though he was doing many good things. He loved his money and the things it could buy most of all.

So Jesus told him to sell everything he owned and give the money to poor people. Do you know what the man did? He went away very sad. He knew that he loved his money more than he loved God. He also knew that he could not change his heart.

This is the bad news for all of us. We cannot change our sinful hearts. So how could anyone be saved from a sinful heart and go to heaven?

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.
(Matthew 19:26)



LEARNING TO TRUST GOD

- ✦ Read Luke 6:43–45 and explain what it means. Where do our actions come from?
- ✦ Read the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16–30. What did Jesus ask the young man to give up? What do those who follow Jesus receive? Which is the greater treasure? Pray that Jesus will be the greatest treasure in your heart.
- ✦ *Activity:* Put a few teaspoons of baking soda into a small container. Then add vinegar. What happens? How is the way that the mixture bubbles up and fizzes over like the actions of our hearts?

Parents work hard to protect their children from danger.
But are we helping to guard them in the spiritual
battle that already rages around them?

Whether he consciously takes sides or not, every person is in the middle of spiritual warfare. None of us can choose to sit on the sidelines—and even our children are not exempt!

So rather than trying to shield them from the very real war around them, why not equip them, as early as possible, to take an active role and fight back?

Sally Michael provides the framework for parents to train their children in the fight of faith. In this full-color, illustrated “battle plan,” she uses the gospel message to introduce children to the state of their hearts, then awakens them to the many battlegrounds that surround us—both from our own sinful hearts and from the Enemy’s attacks.

She then encourages children to be fighters, giving them a biblical battle strategy to depend on God, resist the enemy, and stand strong!



“The Christian life is no Disney adventure. It’s a dangerous journey to the Celestial City, and we spend much of it fighting for faith and for the faith. Our children need to learn early on what the battle is all about, what it’s like to fight, and how to survive.”

—**Jon Bloom**, President, Desiring God

“*God’s Battle* is a theologically rich resource for parents and pastors who want to give children a God-sized vision to fight the good fight of the faith. I highly recommend it.”

—**Josh Mulvihill**, Pastor to Children and Families, Grace Church, Eden Prairie, Minnesota

SALLY MICHAEL is the cofounder and publishing consultant of Children Desiring God, and she developed their widely used Sunday school curriculum for young people. She is also an author and a speaker, and she served as Minister for Children at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for sixteen years.

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 children desiring God

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