

The Battle Begins

*This might surprise you,
but following God involves engaging
in an ongoing series of battles
to live in his will and walk in his ways ...
this will always be part of our story.*

Introduction

Have you ever watched a documentary on how salmon swim upstream to spawn? These fish swim with all their might, against a strong current. They literally launch themselves up waterfalls and over jagged rocks. An irresistible force drives them upward and onward. It is inspiring to watch.

But some of the salmon get tired. In their exhaustion they stop swimming and immediately are swept backward ... downstream. The current gets the best of them and they give up.

Following God's will in this world can be a lot like being a salmon swimming upstream. God calls us to fight against the cultural current every day of our lives! It is a battle, a war, and daily challenge to keep living for God in a world where the flow is diametrically opposed to God's will and ways.

We have a choice. Swim with all our might and keep fighting and pressing on. Or, give up and find ourselves floating back downstream. We make this choice many times each day.

Talk About It

Can you think of a time in your life when you were faced with an overwhelming challenge that you needed to confront? What was it and how did you respond?

DVD Teaching Notes

As you watch the video segment for session 7, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

God instructs Joshua: "Be strong and courageous"

Committing to be a people of the Word

Growing as a people of prayer

Proud to be a people identified with God

DVD Discussion

1. What did God call his people to do as they got ready to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1 – 11; *The Story*, pp. 89 – 90)?
2. The first time spies were sent into the land, twelve of them went. Only two gave a good report; the other ten were so negative that they convinced the people of Israel the rewards weren't worth the risk. Four decades later, Joshua sent a team of only two into the land. Randy said, "Committees seldom make courageous decisions." Discuss the value of following a couple of bold leaders rather than a committee when it comes to those moments when we need to move forward quickly and with courage.
3. Just like the people of Israel, we sometimes are fearful of challenges and don't want to deal with them. What challenge in your life have you put on the back burner, but you know it is time to face it and deal with it? How can your group members pray for you, cheer you on, and keep you accountable in this process?

*In the Lower Story the giants
are bigger than the Israelites.
In the Upper Story God
is bigger than the giants.*

4. How does consistent and faith-filled reading of the Bible (God's Story) help us remain strong and courageous as we swim upstream against the currents of this world?

What are your personal habits and commitments when it comes to Bible study? How can your group members encourage you to grow in your love for God's Word?

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
(Joshua 1:8; The Story, p. 89)

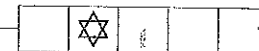
5. Joshua read the words of God's story to all the people: children, teens, and the adults. What are ways we can help the children and young people in our lives grow in their knowledge of and love for the Bible? How can this be done in both our homes and churches?

6. Chapter 7 of *The Story* teaches us that we should always talk with God to make sure he is going before us and that we are not heading off on our own. Why is it so important to pray, listen to God, and follow his leading when we make life decisions? What are some of the possible

consequences if we forget to do this? What area of your life do you need to commit to more prayer and listening?

7. Baptism is an outward sign of our identification with God. What is the meaning of baptism and why is this public celebration so important and powerful? Have a few people share their baptism stories.

8. When Christians live in a world that flows so strongly against the desires and heart of God, we often are identified as believers simply by the way we live. Name some actions and attitudes that show the world we are followers of Jesus.



9. Read movement 2 of *The Story* (p. 11 of this participant's guide). How have you seen God seeking to reveal his presence, power, and plan in your life?

Closing Prayer

As you take time to pray, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Pray for a renewed and deeper love for God's Word and a commitment to read and study it daily.
- Ask God to help you communicate more often and with greater intimacy as you speak with him in prayer.
- Pray that your group members would grow more bold and courageous and be ready to face any challenge or battle that God places before them.

Between Sessions

Personal Reflections

Think through the three areas of preparation for battle that Randy discusses from chapter 7 of *The Story*:

- How can I go deeper into God's Word and follow it with greater passion in my daily life?
- What steps can I take to make more space for conversation with God in my normal day, especially when I am facing battles?
- When people look at me, in a normal day, do they see that I am a follower of Jesus? What can I do to live and think in ways that will identify me more closely with the Savior?

Personal Action

In the course of reading chapter 7 of *The Story* and meeting with your group, God might have brought to your attention an area of your life where you have given in and stopped swimming against the current of our world. It is not that you don't care, but you are being swept downstream in the wrong direction. If you felt such a conviction, make a commitment to take specific steps to follow God's will, resist temptation, and begin your battle against this particular area of sin or apathy. Find a friend who will pray for you and keep you accountable to keep up the good fight.

Read for Next Session

Take time before your next small group to read chapter 8 of *The Story*.