

Episode 052

Inside Out: Crucial Battles

- Mark 14:32–42 (NIV) 32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.” 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” 37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. 41 Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”
- Jesus was approaching the toughest battle He would ever face on earth. The journey to the crucifixion. Consider the humiliation, the pain, the suffering, the agony and even the separation from God the Father that He would face.
- Yet the victory for the greatest battle occurred before it started. It occurred in the early hours of the night at the Garden of Gethsemane. These few hours spent on bended knees are of crucial significance as Jesus wrestled in spirit, soul and body in the weakness of His humanity even as He fought for the very destiny of humanity.
- Through His great struggle, we discover the significance of the crucial battles that must be fought in our own hearts in order to gain external victories. Too many leaders focus on the external battles but neglect the far more important inner battles.



- There are 2 major reasons why the inner battles should be given priority. First, spiritual battles are often won first by the inner battles. Second, resolving the inner battles first enables us to be in the right mindset to tackle the external battles.
- Imagine fighting on 2 battle fronts at the same time: one inside and another outside. Our attention is split: our mental, emotional and spiritual resources. Winning the battle inside first means there is the excess energy, motivation to focus on pushing forward externally during an intense battle.
- Imagine a leader that has issues with insecurities but the battle has not been won on that front. Then his leadership is challenged by others in the organisation due to on-going disagreements. The external battle now impacts severely on the inside because his insecurities will flare up. He now has to struggle with his insecurities and deal with leadership challenge. His attention, energies are diverted on two fronts. It becomes much tougher to win the battles.
- Now imagine if this leader manages to resolve his internal issue quickly. He can now give his full attention to the external battle. The possibility to overcoming the leadership challenge now increases markedly.
- Hence, the more inner battles we can win first and quickly, will mean greater success on the external. What are some of these crucial inner battles?

1. THE FAITH BATTLE, THE KEY TO SPIRITUAL VICTORY (v32)

“They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”

- Jesus knew exactly what laid ahead of Him. So He chose a solitary place to pray it through. Jesus knew He had to engage in spiritual warfare.
- As spiritual leaders, we must engage in spiritual battles involving the spirit realm. Ephesians 6:12 (NIV84) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.



- Such spiritual enemies cannot be defeated by human efforts and human means. It requires spiritual armours, weapons and strategies. Ephesians 6:13 (NIV84) Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.
- 2 Corinthians 10:4 (NIV84) The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.
- Yet the use of these armours and weapons requires our faith. Faith to put it on and faith to wield it. Will we have the faith to trust in God more than the problem at hand? The faith to fight the good fight despite facing a big enemy. Will our faith overcome our fears, doubts, unbelief, etc? We must win first the battle of faith in our hearts.
- When we launched our church plant in Brisbane, we only had a visa for 2 months with no certainty of extension. But we trusted God's instruction to church-plant in Brisbane because we already had the confidence in God's provision!
- How?
- By gaining the faith-eyes to see what God sees, not what others may see. Joshua and Caleb vs the 10 spies. The 10 spies saw giants in the land and felt like grasshoppers. Joshua and Caleb saw those giants shrink to grasshoppers before God. Our faith must grow to turn giants into grasshoppers. We must take the time to wrestle that through with God.
- By growing our faith to trust God for it. Joshua and Caleb believed for the Promised Land. Our faith has to grow to reach a certainty of God's provision.
- Then when we are confronted with the challenges, our faith can withstand it.

2. EMOTIONAL BATTLE, THE KEY TO CONSISTENT VICTORY (v33-34) "33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."



- How emotionally troubled was Jesus at that point? The vividness of the words portrays a man so emotionally overwhelmed with sorrow that it felt like dying. It is like being swallowed alive in a quicksand of sorrow.
- The physical intensity of His emotions is captured in Luke 22:44 (NIV) And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.
- Imagine the level of stress causing blood capillaries at our skin to burst. The burdens upon His soul were immense, adding to the spiritual battles He was fighting at that point as well.
- Leaders often carry the weight of their organisation or group at various times. The burden can be overwhelming, like never-ending waves pounding upon the shore. If these burdens overwhelm and paralyse us, then the battle is lost.
- Too many leaders fail because they fail to gain victory in the battle of emotions. The Enemy knows this very well and he will push every emotional button to sink us.
- In 1 Sam 30, the Amalekites captured David and his men's families at Ziklag. The men were so distraught that they even blamed David for losing their families. Being a sensitive soul himself, David must have felt pain and grief very keenly.
- Yet David refused to sink into the abyss of sorrow, instead he found strength in God. David held firm of his emotions and turned to God.
- Lifted by the hope God gave and the prophetic confirmation to chase after the Amalekites, David and his men gave chase. The rest is history.
- Leaders must learn to fight the battle of emotions. We must manage our emotions. Keep it under control, do not allow it to get the better of us. To find hope from God and strength to fight the immediate battles.
- Leaders must overcome negative emotions and remain level-headed to lead the team.



- Yet leaders must not bottle all our emotions up and bury it deep. Because if we do this too often it will eventually explode and cause us to implode.
- Instead, leaders must learn to grieve and mourn where we must, at appropriate times.
- Leaders must learn to acknowledge the emotions and process it. Understanding why it affected us as it did. Coming to terms with the causes. Learning lessons that we ought to. Committing to God what we cannot change. Trusting God through it all.
- Leader must let the tide of emotions pass through yet use its energy to build something stronger from it.
- Leaders who learn to do these will eventually build greater emotional resilience. Learning how to absorb the pains and let it out but at a different frequency. A positive, godly frequency.
- As we grow in these, we can fight bigger emotional battles and gain victory.
- Winning the emotional battle is the key to consistent victory because we are less swayed by the roller-coaster of emotions.

3. CONVICTION BATTLE, THE KEY TO FULL VICTORY (v35-36)

“35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

- Jesus battled in His heart. On one hand, facing the unimaginable pain that laid ahead. On the other hand, determination to do His Father’s will. His convictions for the latter won.
- 2 Kings 13:15-19 tells the story when King Jehoash visited a dying prophet Elisha. Elisha told him to strike the ground with his arrow. King Jehoash struck it only 3 times. Elisha was upset because he should have strike it 5 to 6 times. Elisha prophesied that King Jehoash will only defeat the Arameans 3 times. If he would defeat them 5 or 6 times, he would have completely destroyed them. Jehoash will not fully succeed because he lacked the conviction.



- On the other hand, David convincingly beat Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 because of conviction. It was a clear win. A full victory.
- Why? Conviction motivates us to penetrate further into enemy lines, hit harder, more persistently. Deep conviction will not allow us to be satisfied with partial, temporary victories. Conviction means we go all the way to complete the job. That is how we obtain compelling victories.
- Leaders must have strong, solid conviction about the mission they are on. The principles upon which they stand.
- I shared about the importance of The Leaders Convictions in a 2-part leadership podcast at wilsonlailing.com. Do check it out.
- I have faced many challenges along the way in my leadership. Some could have blown me off course from the mission God gave me. But my deep convictions about God's calling upon my life, has kept me on course. I have stood my ground for the past 30+ years and will do so till I meet my Maker.
- The battle of our conviction is a battle to deepen our convictions enough to withstand the storms that rally against us. To have grown our conviction roots deep enough to anchor us against the onslaught. Conviction is the key to a full victory.

4. THE FOCUS BATTLE, THE KEY TO GAINING DIVINE VICTORY (v36a) ““Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you.”

- Jesus had absolutely the right focus. On God. A key to divine victory in the battle is having our focus on God, rather than on the problem. When we are focussed on God, we are reminded God is far bigger than our problems. But if we are focussed on the problem, we forget how big God is.
- Part of our inner battle is learning how to keep our focus on God. Even through the roughest times.
- In the Ziklag story, the key to the successful turnaround was David's focus on God. In God, David found the strength. In God, David found the solution.



- Isaiah 40:31 (NIV) but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
- We have to train our soul and spirit so that its default is to focus on God.

THE CHARACTER BATTLE, THE KEY TO LASTING VICTORY (v37-38)

“37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

- By temptations, Jesus was likely referring to their succumbing to the coming pressures. For all the disciples ran away. Mark 14:50 (NIV) Then everyone deserted him and fled.
- Jesus had asked His 3 core disciples to watch and pray because there was a coming battle of their characters. To be courageous or to give in to fears.
- There are many battles which are not won once, but the fruit of victory has to be maintained. One key area that helps us maintain that victory is due to the strength of our character. Otherwise, the same battles will return again. Lasting victory requires us to resolve those specific character weaknesses. To win the character battle inside.
- Many battles were lost due to character inadequacies. Perhaps due to an anger problem. Moses had an anger problem and it costed him entering the Promise Land. Perhaps it is a negativity. The prophet Elijah had a depression tendency. As a result, he could not continue to confront Ahab and Jezebel. Perhaps it is jealousy. King Saul’s jealousy of David drove him to extremes, and he became obsessed with getting rid of David.
- Growing up, I was a self-centred person. I was much more concerned about myself than others. If I had continued with that character weakness, I would not be available to be used by God as I am today. God had to transform my heart. I had to win the character battle in this area to become much more selfless. So that I would willingly avail myself to God. Make huge personal sacrifices for the sake of the church and others. And continue to do so. Lasting victory is possible when we win the character battle first.



- Have you noticed the same battles connected to a character flaw of yours? You have yet to win that character battle! Win it and you will discover more victories that are lasting.

6. THE PERSISTENCE BATTLE, THE KEY TO GAINING BREAKTHROUGHS (v39-40) “39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.”

- Jesus was persistent in His praying. 3 times he grappled with the matters at hand. He did not give up. Even though His disciples could not keep up, but kept falling asleep.
- Many battles require our persistence. Our doggedness to keep at chipping away until the dam breaks, the breakthrough comes.

7. THE EXTERNAL BATTLE, THE KEY TO SECURING THE FINAL VICTORIES (v41-42) “41 Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

- Jesus was ready when the time came for Judas’s betrayal. For Jesus had already fought all the inner battles He needed that night. That is not to mean there are no more battles. The external battle still had to be fought. But the victory is already assured from the inner battles won.
- For Jesus had fully settled his heart with God the Father and knew what He had to do.
- By the time Lai Ling and I launched our church in Brisbane, we had settled the inner battles. By faith we saw what was to be. Our conviction was to pay the price, whatever it took. Emotionally, we were ready for the roller-coaster ride of church planting. We were determined that nothing was to distract our focus upon God. Character-wise we had humbly submitted every aspect of who we were unto God for His dealings. We were ready to persist until God’s purposes come to pass. The rest is history.





CONCLUSIONS

All of us will face battles great and small. Yet the biggest battles are usually won inside first. What are some of the inner battles that you need to win?



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. This article advocates identifying and winning the inner battles first before tackling the external battles. What are your thoughts on this concept?
2. What convictions have you developed from listening/reading this article?
3. Which battle speaks to you the most and why?

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Identify one area that you should resolve the inner battle now in order that you can significant advance in your leadership. Work out what steps you need to take to address that area.
2. Is there one inner area that you are particularly weak in and would clearly struggle if a battle was to be fought in that area. Why is it your significant weakness. What steps can you take to address the weakness?





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