

“I’ve been recommending *The Fight* to new and old believers for years. John White sets a powerful example of how to struggle against darkness, persevere, and live victoriously in our lives with Jesus. I’m grateful for his practical wisdom on how to build a deep and vital life with Jesus in the midst of a broken world.”

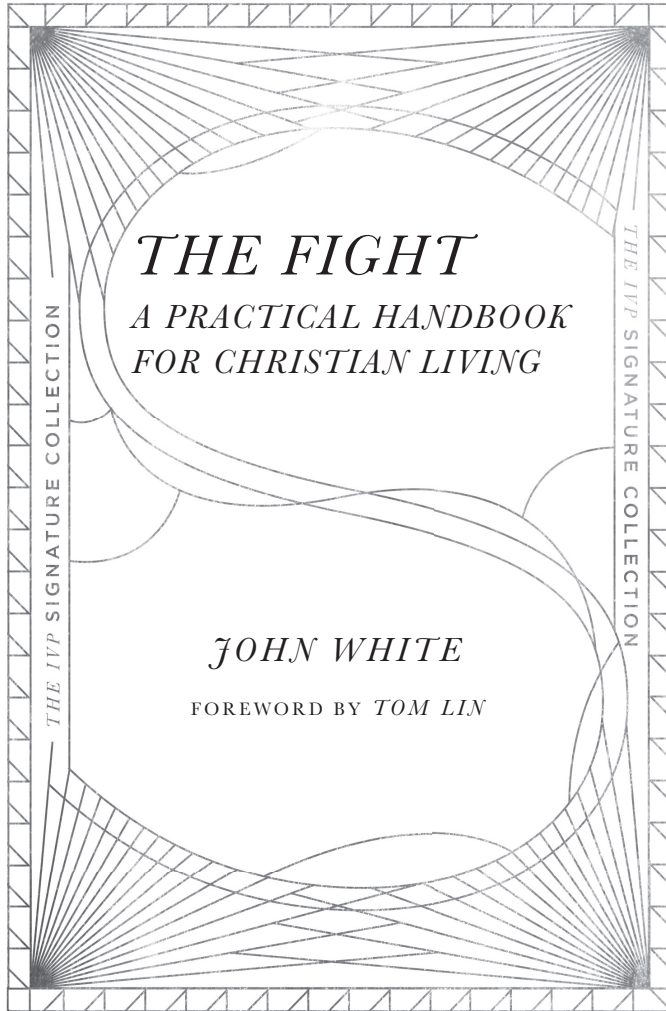
Jay Pathak, lead pastor of the Mile High Vineyard, Denver

“*The Fight* helped me immeasurably in my early days as a new Christian—and it continues to encourage me now. In short, *The Fight* is timeless and still a must-read!”

Rebecca Manley Pippert, author of *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World* and *Stay Salt*

“Years ago, when I worked in campus ministry, I would often use *The Fight* with new believers (or anyone wanting to get serious about understanding and growing in their faith). I thought it was the most interesting, valuable, balanced, and nearly comprehensive tool around to help folks understand the ongoing process of deepening their discipleship. From its great opening about the process of conversion to topics as vital as new relationships, temptation, serving God at work, and being a witness, it generated so many great discussions and helped scores of us keep on without getting disillusioned. Decades later much has changed, but as a bookseller I continue to suggest this as, yes, one of the most interesting, valuable, balanced, and nearly comprehensive books for new Christians or anyone wanting to buckle down and learn the standard practices of fighting the good fight. I’m glad for this nice new edition and hope a new generation will find its older depth and winsome wisdom to equip them for living well in these times.”

Byron Berger, Hearts & Minds Bookstore, Dallastown, Pennsylvania



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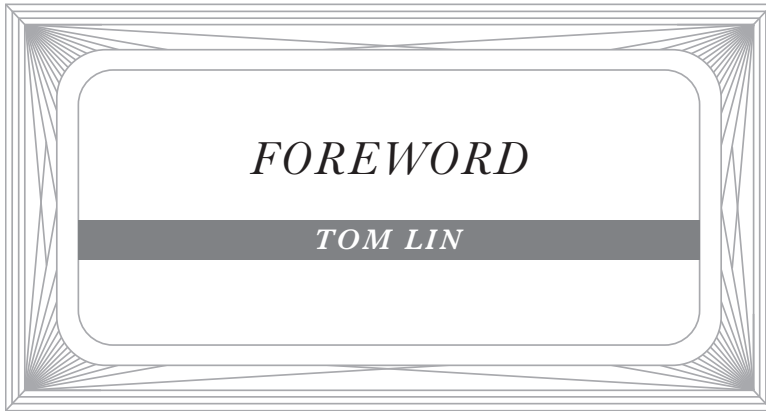
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TO ALEC CLIFFORD

*without whose encouragement I would never
have written for publication*

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FOREWORD

TOM LIN

I did not know how desperately I needed this book when my Bible study leader handed it to me. I had recently decided to submit my life under Jesus' lordship, hoping to start anew in my walk with God. I had spent the last year in an intense Bible study, learning to follow Jesus with my whole life. I was excited, motivated and open to what God had for me. But I didn't know where to start. What was my next step? It was at that moment that my Bible study leader handed me this book.

I was pretty sure I had already heard everything to be said about following Jesus before. After all, I wasn't a new Christian. I had grown up in church, attended Sunday school and participated in youth group. But this book provided fresh insights into just about every part of my spiritual life. I highlighted dozens and dozens of sentences—unexpected metaphors that still inform the way I share my faith. Paradigms that still fuel my prayers. Wisdom that I still share when I counsel, mentor or preach. Insights that convicted me then and convict me still.

Let me give you an example. I still remember the moment I read the words, "We are not allowed to choose our brothers and sisters or whether we shall be committed to them or not." John White's words upended my world. *If I was a member of God's new family, I would have to be committed to all my brothers and sisters.* I no longer had the right to choose who I would love. Favoritism wasn't permitted.

The impact was immediate. I began to learn how to love people on campus who were, honestly, quite difficult to love. I began to look for the people who were not already represented in our fellowship. I began to serve those I was not naturally drawn to serving. Over time, God grew my heart for brothers and sisters on the margins. He opened my eyes to the families who sat at the back of our church and who struggled to make ends meet, to the fellow students who always sat alone in the dining hall, to people—and ultimately nations—that others ignored. John White’s deceptively simple words led me to Mongolia, to Missouri and now to Madison, Wisconsin, as president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Each move has been motivated by a commitment to see and to serve every member of God’s family.

Of course, it has not been easy to apply everything that I read in *The Fight*. If John White’s advice is practical (and it is very practical), his aspirations for us readers are astronomical. Listen, for example, to what he says about sanctification: “God’s holiness is not merely total separation from uncleanness but a positive goodness beyond our capacity to conceive. The very heavens are unclean in his sight. Yet it is this same goodness and beauty which he wants to share with you. He wants you to be like him.” I still remember reading these words and wondering, *How can this be possible?* And it was precisely when I felt most defeated that I appreciated John White’s honesty, vulnerability and transparency the most. More than just offering practical counsel, he acknowledged the struggle of the Christian life. He knew it was a fight against the powers of darkness. He knew it was a battle. And he trusted Christ would be victorious.

Today, twenty-five years after I first read this book, the fight continues. The struggles in my Christian life continue. There are setbacks and temptations, and there are periods of growth and victories. I did not know how desperately I needed this book when my Bible study leader handed it to me, but I understand now. I continue to rely on the foundations that *The Fight* taught me, turning to Scripture, prayer and the church body as the battles come. I continue to wake up each morning trying to live *for* Christ and to become more *like* him. I strive to fight daily in the sacrificial ways that the apostle Paul exhorted us to:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:1-2, NIV).

It is a daily fight. But in periods of doubt or discouragement, I lean into the truth that I serve a God who has already won the battle. He is the Unconquerable One. And so I lean into the fight with hope, with faith and with joy. I hope you will too.

I often think the best recommendation for a book about Christian living is the example of how the author lived and died. Too many authors of bestselling Christian books have ended poorly, raising questions about the wisdom of their writing or about the integrity of their lives. Perhaps this story about John White’s final days will help you understand why I believe so deeply in this book. Why I hope a wise friend has handed you a copy, and why I hope you will hand a copy to someone in return.

John White had an extraordinary ministry as a missionary in Latin America, as a professor of psychiatry in Canada, and as a Bible teacher throughout the world. Sadly, much of the brilliance you will encounter in this book was taken away by the ravages of Alzheimer’s. In the last week of his life, he was walking in the woods with one of his sons, who asked him, “Dad, are you ever mad at God about the Alzheimer’s?” John White shook his head.

“Are you ever mad about the Alzheimer’s?” his son then asked.

John White nodded. “Yes. Mad about the Alzheimer’s. Never at God.” Then, in one of those lucid moments that Alzheimer’s patients are sometimes blessed with, he sang these words from memory:

All the way my Savior leads me; What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my
Guide?

Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate’er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

All the way my Savior leads me; Oh, the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above.
When my spirit, clothed immortal, wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the way.
(Fanny J. Crosby, "All the Way My Savior Leads Me," 1875)

John White kept the faith. He finished the race. He fought the good fight, and he fought it well. May it be so for you and me.

CHAPTER ONE

BEGINNINGS

When you became a Christian, a number of extremely important events took place both in heaven and in your own body.

You may or may not have felt anything. Christians have widely differing experiences, ranging from intense emotions to nothing at all. You may not even be able to say when you became a Christian. All you may know is that at this moment you acknowledge the Jesus of history to be your Savior and your God.

Yet whatever you felt or did not feel and whether or not you know when you became a Christian, the events I speak of took place. As I describe them I shall, in a way, be defining what a Christian is.

Purely psychological events occur in all varieties of conversion. Had you been converted to communism or to any religion or world view, you would have experienced them. The psychological factors have been long recognized and well described. They consist of temporary “feeling states” and a turn around in a person’s understanding of life.

In Christian conversion, as in any other conversion, you may experience many such psychological events and you will certainly experience a change in life view. What makes Christian conversion different is that supernatural events also occur. The feeling states in non-Christian conversion are temporary. They are equally temporary in Christian conversion.

But the supernatural, and often unfelt, events are permanent. They mark you in the sight of demons and angels as a human who is different. They bring your body into touch with eternity and with the Eternal God.

A NEW STATUS BEFORE GOD

In the first place, you have been *justified*. This is to say that God looks upon you and deals with you as *though you were perfectly righteous*, as though you had never sinned and will never sin. However difficult this idea may be for you to grasp, it represents an event that has already taken place and that will never change.

It is not that God wears blinders and pretends you are better than you are. He knows about your sin. Yet his feelings toward you and his dealings with you are based on a righteousness Christ has given you. God treats you as though you were as righteous as Jesus. You may be uncomfortable with this idea. I shall deal with it more fully later on. As the impact of it breaks over your understanding you will marvel. Far from wanting to sin you will sense how you have been set free to be holy.

Your justification is both a heavenly event and a time-space event. It is a heavenly event insofar as Jesus is at this moment on the right hand of God's throne acting as your personal guarantor and representative. It is a heavenly event, too, in that your name is now recorded in the "not guilty" annals of heaven. It is an earthly event since you, a creature of time and space, may boldly step into the presence of the God of eternity and hold a conversation with him. Indeed you are encouraged to do so. Notice, you are not given permission to *crawl* into God's presence but to approach him with your head held high.

A second event that took place in your body is what is known as *regeneration* or new birth. By this event, eternity invaded space and re-established permanent links between your personality and the Eternal. Again, you may have experienced little or nothing when this most profound event occurred. By a miracle of divine grace a nonbiological life was implanted in you. It is a form of life that will enable you one day to inhabit eternity just as your biological life now enables you to live in time-space.

The life that entered you was the life of God himself. Your earthly parents gave life from their living bodies which became your life when you were born. In the same way God, in imparting to you his own life, became in very deed your heavenly Father. You are a child of God in a *literal*, not a metaphorical sense.

But the life must grow and develop. As it does so you will reflect, more and more, the likeness of the Father from whom the life came, just as some degree of likeness to your physical parents accompanies growth in your physical and emotional life. As God's life within you grows, it will influence both your emotional and your physical development. You will become more mature emotionally. Other things being equal, you will enjoy better physical health. Your new birth does not guarantee that you will never be emotionally or physically sick, but it will move you in the direction of improved health.

For your new life to grow, it must be fed and exercised. The food it requires is the Holy Scriptures. Exercise will consist of obedience by faith to the commands of God. You will also need to breathe deep drafts of heavenly air as your prayer life develops. All of these factors which contribute to your spiritual growth will be examined carefully in the chapters that follow. For the present it is enough to know that you are a hybrid—a being with two types of life and two sets of parentage.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD AND PEOPLE

As we have already begun to see, the events that have occurred to you include dramatic changes in your personal relationships. Once alienated from God, you have changed to being at peace with him as well as being his child. Christ, his unique Son whom you may formerly have ignored, now has a relationship with you, and you with him, which is many-faceted. He is your Shepherd and you are his sheep. As time goes on you will become increasingly expert at discerning his voice and being able to follow wherever he leads. On his part he guarantees you refreshment and rest, provided you follow him, and a determination to bring you back to the flock should you stray and get lost.

He is also your master, and you his slave. He always had the right to treat you as a slave, but he never whipped you into submission. Implicit in

your new relationship is a recognition on your part that you *are* his slave and will allow him the right to govern your entire life. For though he demands obedience, he will still never force it. You have the power to deny him his rights. In doing so you would violate your commitment to him and damage your spiritual well-being. You would dishonor him. Nevertheless, he refuses either to turn you into an automaton or to be brutal to you.

He is also your priest, your “great high priest.” When you come to the Father, you do so because of his offices. At those times when feelings of weakness and frustration crush you, you will find fresh courage when you remember your high priest is still human as well as divine. Having personally experienced every human temptation and stress, he can understand how you feel. He sympathizes with your weakness. Because of his eternal humanness, he is uniquely equipped both to support you and to plead for you.

We could discuss many facets of your relationship with Christ. He is your captain in battle and you his soldier. He is the bread on whom you feed. He is the light illuminating your interior darkness. And so we could go on. What in essence all of this means is that you now belong to him and he to you in a relationship of vital interchanges. Bonds have been established between you that nothing in heaven, earth or hell can break.

Many of your other relationships have changed too. For instance, you are now part of an innumerable company of redeemed human beings, both here and beyond death. You are a co-citizen with martyrs and apostles. Though my words may conjure up in your mind visions of swords, robes and sandals, your heavenly citizenship also has to do with mundane relationships in everyday life.

If you were brought up in a large family, you may have noticed that it was more difficult to get on with your brothers and sisters (or perhaps with one or two of them) than with friends outside the family. At times of crisis (such as when bullies picked on your bratty kid brother), you would all unite. But at other times tensions would exist.

Do not be surprised then to discover tensions within your heavenly family. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are not perfect. After the first happy glow, during which you may idealize them, you will be shocked to discover bitterness, bickering and overt hostility in the Christian “family.”

You will also discover that some Christians are stupid, ornery, tactless, “stuffed shirts,” prudes, hypocrites and so on. Some will be bigoted advocates of totally unacceptable political positions, and others will slurp their soup or have bad breath. We shall come to the complex question of how you relate to them later on. For the present it is enough that you remember that God loves them even though you find it hard to. You must also be charitable enough to admit that there may be unattractive features in your own personality. You don’t wear robes and sandals yourself.

Finally, you must realize that the same new life that is in you is in them. Look well at their faults and see for yourself that the miracle of new life does not guarantee beauty of character. The life needs to grow and develop. That is why I am writing my book. I feel a great urge inside me to share with you as much as I can of what is important in practical Christian living.

A FOE OF LEGIONS

You have also established a new relationship with the powers of darkness. Whatever you were before you became a Christian—straight, horoscope reader, witch, warlock or Satanist—you are now the sworn foe of the legions of hell.

Have no delusions about their reality or their hostility. But do not fear them. The God inside you terrifies them. They cannot touch you, let alone hurt you. But they can still seduce and they will try. They will also oppose you as you obey Christ. If you play it cool and decide not to be a fanatic about Christianity, you will have no trouble from them. But if you are serious about Christ being your Lord and God, you can expect opposition.

“Resist the devil,” writes James, “and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7). Life with Jesus can be an exhilarating and reassuring experience of constant triumph over evil forces. But the battle never ends. I write more about this later on.

Yet I would be foolish to suppose that I could, by writing a book or you by reading it, ensure your steady Christian growth. What both of us must realize is that you have been given a personal tutor. His coming

to you is the most important event associated with your becoming a Christian. Whether you felt his coming or not, the Holy Spirit has taken up his dwelling place in you. Christ's object in sending him was to insure that you get even better instruction than the apostles had by having Jesus in their midst. You may lament the fact that Jesus is no longer here physically. But as Jesus sees it, you have a greater privilege by having God's Spirit inside you.

The Holy Spirit is a self-effacing person. He does not wish to tell you much about himself, preferring rather to instruct you about Christ and your relationship with him. You can learn about the Holy Spirit by reading certain passages in John's Gospel, which are listed at the end of this chapter. It is the Holy Spirit who will make truth come alive for you by enabling you to grasp it clearly, by reminding you of things he has previously taught you, by drilling you in difficult exercises that get at your personality weaknesses, by encouraging you when you are down, by echoing the good Shepherd's voice in your hearing and in many other ways.

If *he* uses my book, and far more important, the Scriptures, then you will make progress. If you rely on *him* rather than upon mechanical devices or religious exercises (both of which have a place) you will grow.

You may have periods of darkness or of doubt. You may encounter painful struggles and discouragement. But there will also be moments of exultation and glory. And most important of all, you will become free.

A PASSAGE TO STUDY

Don't read chapter two yet. Instead, spend half an hour quietly praying over the following passages. Make notes on them and try to answer the questions. Choose a modern translation if you have one.

Read John's Gospel (the fourth book in the New Testament), chapter 14, verses 15-26—these verses form part of Christ's final briefing session with the apostles.

1. Compare verse 16 (in which "another Counselor" would come to the apostles and stay with them forever) with verse 18 and verse 20. We are told that the Holy Spirit, as well as being a person in his own right, is also the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of the

Father. This is hard for us to grasp. What support would such an idea find in this passage?

2. What functions of the Holy Spirit are described here? Make a note of them and remember that the same Holy Spirit dwells in your body, too.
3. Read John chapter 15, verse 26 to chapter 16, verse 15. What further functions of the Holy Spirit are described? How would they apply in your own life?
4. In this chapter of my book I suggest that the Holy Spirit is self-effacing. What support does John's Gospel lend to this idea?