
NO MATTER THE COST

VANCE BROWN
WITH JOHN BLASE



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*This is a book for the barely brave
who've lived long enough to know
the texture of pain,
the smell of defeat,
the sound of loneliness,
the sight of betrayal,
and the taste of discouragement.
It is a book for broken men
who've come to their senses
and are limping toward home,
refusing to give up no matter the cost.*

*This book is dedicated to the most important person of
my life—my wife: I love you, Betsy. Thank you for forgiv-
ing me. Your wisdom and beauty are captivating. You are
precious to me. I look forward to getting old with you!*

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Foreword

This book has stirred up something in me that will never be the same again. My wife, Shaunti, and I have known Vance Brown for years and were delighted when he approached us about writing the foreword. But we were absolutely unprepared to be rocked by the power of this message—and by the overwhelming feeling that God is using these pages to awaken something in millions of men who instinctively know that they are called to be part of a larger story.

Every man dreams of being great—or at least we did when we were young and had a wide-open future. We dream of being a great athlete, great businessman, great thinker, great husband, great dad. We want to be men of valor, of courage; men who protect the ones we love and who accomplish something that matters with our lives. Yet at the same time, every man I know, every man in our research, secretly questions whether he has what it takes. It is easy to allow our self-doubts and the challenges of life to press in on us, diminish us, reduce us to settling for something other than the high calling we once thought we were supposed to achieve.

Maybe, we think, we are foolish to believe we are made for something more.

This book shines a spotlight inside the deepest, most important desires of our hearts as men, and shows us that those desires are not only acceptable and right—they are what we are built for. This book shows us that it has never been more imperative for us to pursue the high callings God has set before us, no matter the cost.

Yes, we are imperfect and broken, and many of us have made foolish, even life-altering mistakes; yet in these pages you will find other imperfect, broken, foolish men . . . who have become great warriors in the battle of our time. In these pages you will see stories of their trials, sufferings, and failures. You will see that their mingled feelings of confusion and latent courage, inadequacy and resolve are just like ours. This book gave me comfort and hope as I read some of these tales and found the common denominators for coming out on the other side: trust in our Father’s plan and goodness—and being simply unwilling to quit.

The name of Vance’s ministry, Band of Brothers, originates from the stirring words of Shakespeare in his play (and the movie) *Henry V*, as he imagined what King Henry V might have said to his troops before the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. The English were weakened, sick, and demoralized, facing impossible odds in the battle to defeat the French, who were blocking their route home. The king’s cousin, Westmoreland, laments aloud the wish for more men, but the king will hear none of it. Instead, he calls the troops he does have together with a powerful call to courage and brotherhood, ending with the famous words, “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother.” Shortly thereafter comes the news that the

French are charging, and the previously quaking Westmoreland cries out in readiness, “Perish the man whose mind is backward now!”

The king asks, “Thou dost not wish more help from England, coz?”

Westmoreland shouts, “God’s will! My liege, would you and I alone, without more help, could fight this royal battle!”

What turned a group of demoralized, broken men facing daunting odds into men that ended up routing their enemies and, indeed, winning this vital battle? The leadership of their king, the fellowship with their brothers, and the call to great courage and action at a pivotal time.

That is the message of this book. Today we have a King who is calling each of us to great courage, great action, together. He is calling us to look beyond the visible and see the great battle that is taking place in our world today—a fight and a stand to which the men of God are called, regardless of what comes.

Every man wants to be those men of greatness. And, as Shaunti puts it, every woman wants today’s men to rise up and become those men of greatness as well.

We live in challenging times, and like Vance, I believe the battle for our world, our nation, and our families will only grow more intense in the season ahead. We need men who won’t give up, no matter the cost. May you, may I, be a part of that Band of Brothers.

—Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn
entrepreneurs, social researchers,
and bestselling authors of
For Men Only and *For Women Only*

Acknowledgments

Pete Gannon and Matt Dealy, thank you for fighting side by side with me in this ministry called Band of Brothers. This book has the message and charge God has given *us*. It has been my honor to serve and journey together with you good men. Brent Curtis, to me you are the “father” of our Band of Brothers ministry. Thanks for believing in me. Looking forward to seeing you and sharing stories on the other side. Keith Brown, what an honor it is to be your brother in Christ and blood brother. What an awesome redemptive story we have together. Satan didn’t win! Philip Brown, another blood brother, you are not crazy—I also believe we are in the end moments. Never stop singing your song. Tim and Karen Pfeifer, I am so grateful that my children have had a second home. Tim, you are a dear brother and business partner. Karen, thank you for your prophetic letter to me twelve years ago that introduced me to Revelation 12:11. I am also grateful to Mark Beamer, Cris Child, Britt Jones, Jim Kretchman, Aaron McHugh, Steve Metcalf, Mark Morris, Matt Neigh, Tim Oakley, and Pete Ohlin. It is awesome to

experience true Jonathan-David friendships and prove that they can exist in these days!

I also want to thank my children and parents: Collin, even though you are young, through your valiant battle with cancer, you taught me more about courage and faith than anyone I know. We experienced a Rite of Passage together. Noelle, you will always be my little girl, my delight—my princess. You are strong and determined like Eowyn. No one should underestimate you, because God is with you. Dylan, you are a mighty warrior who will always “get back up”—I see it in you. Your lens for truth is way beyond your years. I am so proud of you. Thanks to my parents, Brevard and Doris Brown. I truly am grateful for your love, sacrifices, and prayers.

I want to thank my coauthor-brother (in spite of what the cover says) and my agent-brother: John Blase, you are an anointed warrior-poet. Thanks for giving me the verses to sing my song. Rick Christian, this book would never have happened but for you. Thank you for believing in this project and in me. Your kingdom impact is far-reaching—I’ve witnessed over the years how well you fight and how God rewards you for it!

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Finally, thanks to the brothers in my band who also wielded their swords in powerful and beautiful ways in producing and editing the book and the supplemental video materials. *Audio-visual*: Pete Gannon, Britt Jones, and Stephen Vidano. *Editing and marketing*: Jeff Braun, Mark Chambers, and Carra Carr.

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Prologue

... courage struggling for oxygen.

—Norman Maclean,
Young Men and Fire

I could begin this book by re-creating an epic scene from HBO's *Band of Brothers* or *Gladiator* or *The Lord of the Rings*. I could try to rouse your spirit by trotting out the speech William Wallace gave to those pitchfork-wielding peasants in *Braveheart*. I could pull some thread from *The Matrix* in hopes of causing you to choose the right pill and see how deep the rabbit hole goes. I could do all that and more in the opening pages of this book, but I respect you too much to do so. There is a time and place for those climactic, soul-stirring, swashbuckling moments, but this has to begin in a place we know all too well. We have to start where we are.

You probably remember the two brothers from Frank Capra's classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*—Harry and George Bailey. In a very real sense these characters represent the two

tracks of a man's life. Young Harry Bailey went off to war and returned to a hero's welcome, winning the Congressional Medal of Honor and the admiration of everyone in town. His big brother, George, however, stayed and fought the battle of Bedford Falls. No mortar fire or foxholes or clearly defined enemies for George, just day after day of the same old Bailey Building and Loan, the same drafty old house, the same wife and kids, the same Uncle Billy, the same Mr. Potter. Then came that desperate moment on the town's bridge, that end-of-the-rope belief that he was worth more dead than alive. Even the angels talked about it.

Clarence: You sent for me, sir?

Franklin: Yes, Clarence. A man down on earth needs our help.

Clarence: Splendid. Is he sick?

Franklin: No, worse. He's discouraged.

Bingo. There it is—a man with no hope. I believe that moment captures the reality of most men today—all alone, exhausted, weary, bone-tired, questioning our worth, feeling much more dead than alive, courage struggling for oxygen.

All right. While that may be the reality, I believe it's unacceptable. I don't want that for you or for me. And I don't believe one bit God desires that for the noble ones he created known as *men*. None of us began with the intention to lose heart. If you recall, George Bailey was going to travel the world. His three favorite sounds were anchor chains, plane motors, and train whistles. At one point in the black and white classic he tells young Mary Hatch:

I'm shakin' the dust of this crummy little town off my feet and I'm gonna see the world. Italy, Greece, the Parthenon, the Coliseum. Then, I'm comin' back here to go to college and

see what they know. And then I'm gonna build things. I'm gonna build airfields, I'm gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high, I'm gonna build bridges a mile long.

But that never happened for George, or for many of us. Expectations, circumstances, family responsibilities, unexpected crises, sinful choices, and sometimes just the cards we're dealt stood in the way of our hopes to go and see and build. And after the hopes are deferred time after time after time, the heart becomes sick and discouraged, lost. You hear that train whistle blow from a distance and it just about breaks your heart.

Clarence the Angel gave George Bailey the gift of being able to see what life would be like without him. I can't give you that particular gift. But what I can share with you leads to the same truth, that each man's life touches so many others and if you're not around, it leaves an awful hole. Here's the bottom line—your life matters to this world and the people in it, and it matters to God. He has a design for your life that no one else was created to fulfill. And while I believe that truth has applied to all men in all times, there's something about the moments in which we find ourselves right now, something vital, something stirring. I believe these are monumental days—battle lines are being drawn in the epic war of good versus evil. There is a phrase for this war, taken from one of C. S. Lewis's stories—the “Last Battle.” I believe this is really going to happen, and I believe you are needed. You're not expendable or replaceable. Contrary to the famous first line of a wildly successful book—*it is about you*. Sure, it may not be all about you, but it's got to be a little bit about you, or what's the point of you? Or me? Or any of us?

You may not believe that right now. That's fine. But here's the dare—keep reading. The short chapters that follow aren't wrapped in a pretty red bow; they're stained with blood and dust and sin and grace. My prayer is that you see yourself in these pages, the *you* God created and the *you* others desperately need. I realize you're tired and worn out. Guess what? Me too. But Scripture clearly teaches that you—yes, *you*—and I are called to engage in a battle, the fight of our lives, the struggle we were created for. I know that may sound like some blowhard preacher, but I believe it's true and I'm willing to stake my life on it.

Scripture doesn't indicate that thousands upon thousands of men will turn away from the bridge and step back into life with renewed strength and vision. But it does tell of a proud, happy few, a remnant, a band of barely brave men committed to hanging in there no matter the cost. In other words, you won't be alone. If you're willing to say yes to the call, I can guarantee you a few things:

- You will live out the purpose for which you were created;
- You will have an eternity filled with no regrets;
- You will have a cloud of witnesses cheering you on, including our Lord Jesus—our brother and King.

Oh yeah, one more thing—scars. There will be scars, guaranteed. But they'll be scars that mean something, scars you will tell stories about.

Note: Scattered throughout this book are links to additional material and videos of Christian brothers telling more about their stories than what you will read here. We invite you

to see and experience God's heart through the lens of these sacred stories. All the video stories and additional materials for you, your small group, or church can be found at www.nomatterthecost.com. You'll also find online groups with whom you can engage in the discussions and questions from the study guide in the back of this book.

THE BEGINNING—

**IT'S
ABOUT
YOU**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one
and only son.

—John 3:16

What If?

We must be willing to get rid of the life we planned
so as to have the life waiting for us.

—Joseph Campbell

Do you remember those stories of the NYC firemen running up smoke-filled stairs on September 11, 2001, into the very face of hell itself? Those men risked their lives so that others might live. I believe every man wants to be a part of such a noble story—a larger story, one worth dying for and living for, where fear takes a backseat and courage takes the wheel. Undoubtedly those 9/11 heroes experienced great fear in the face of such adversity, but they weren't paralyzed by it; their greater desire to rescue others gave them the courage to be overcomers, heroes.

But what do we do on days when towers aren't falling or the nation isn't under siege? What do we do on days when

we're faced with the same old family and job and church and commute and life? That's where we need a story that's grand enough to encompass both days: the called-for-heroics of a September 11 and the same-old-same-old of a September 10. I believe a story that big is only found in one place—the Bible, God's Word. All other stories, as tempting as they may be, are too small; they cannot bring you a life of strength and honor or keep you truly alive.

anyone or anything
that does not bring you alive
is too small for you.

—David Whyte,
“Sweet Darkness”

Scripture teaches that Satan has literally *declared war* on all who proclaim to follow Jesus (Revelation 12:17). Please don't miss this—if you claim to be a Christ-follower, you and your family are under constant ruthless and brutal attacks from supreme evil. Satan is described as “wild and raging with anger; he hasn't much time and he knows it” (Revelation 12:12 THE MESSAGE). After the fall of Adam and Eve God says to the serpent, “I'm declaring war between you and the Woman, between your offspring and hers” (Genesis 3:15 THE MESSAGE).

So this much we know—the backdrop for the Last Battle is not a placid lake or some sun-kissed meadow, but a battlefield. Sorry, but that's the deal. So, as you can see, every day is somewhat like September 11 even though it may not feel like it. Since that horrible September day we have been in a war against terrorists who like to remain hidden and unseen. The spiritual war we are facing is similar, against “evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world” (Ephesians 6:12 NLT).

Scripture also reveals the final battle plan of how evil will ultimately be defeated in the Last Battle, the war to end all wars; it is strategically placed in the Bible's most prophetic book:

They defeated [the accuser] through the blood
of the Lamb
and the bold word of their witness.
They weren't in love with themselves;
they were willing to die for Christ.
—Revelation 12:11 THE MESSAGE

Scripture indicates Satan *will be* conquered and peace *will be* restored by those described by the word *they*—warriors some Bible versions call “the saints.” Some have identified these saints as the true disciples of Christ described throughout the New Testament. These pieces of the Last Battle present a soul-searching question to us, one that I hope you'll answer as you read this book:

“Will you be one of the saints used by God to finally defeat evil?”

This is not about running around Chicken Little-style because the sky is falling. This is about banding together and bucking up because the King is coming, and possibly coming soon if the men of God will stop colluding with the evil one and instead stand and rise up, literally for Christ's sake. Make no mistake, our God has the power to defeat evil merely by willing it to be done. As he spoke the universe into existence with a word, he could extinguish evil with a breath. But Scripture teaches that he has chosen to use his saints in this conquest. Again, Scripture asks:

“Will you be one of the saints used by God to finally defeat evil?”

Will you be one of the broken men who has embraced the forgiveness offered through Christ's blood? Will you be one of God's sons willing to boldly share your testimony, your story, all of it? Will you stand as one of the faithful few willing to follow Christ—no matter the cost—even if it means losing your very life in the process? And can you see that God's fight for purity, holiness, and righteousness will not be accomplished by a singular you, but only when you are a part of the plural “they”—the saints?

I won't be vague about this. I believe we are living in the final moments, the concluding scenes in a long battle between good and evil. Notice I did not say “last days,” as I believe those began when Christ ascended back to heaven. No, these are the final moments, when God is rallying his uniquely chosen army of men. Something important is happening. Something big is up.

It's often hard to put into words, but we see small bands of men rising up for the cause of Christ like never before, all around the world. Something is afoot. Don't get me wrong—I understand that many past generations felt the same way. I am not predicting dates for Christ's return, quitting my job, packing my bags, and heading for the mountains to wait for Christ to appear from the clouds. Scripture is clear on that one—only the Father knows the time and hour. Our stance is to be ready. We are commanded to be on guard and alert and to keep watch for Christ's return (Mark 13:33, 37). Needless to say, I am keenly aware that any given day may be *my* last. So regardless of when “Thy Kingdom comes,” Scripture compels us to live as if Christ

will return this day, or during this night, or possibly in the next breath. But what if, just what if the end or the culmination of these final moments might come sooner if men would band together, rise up, and fight shoulder to shoulder for the noble cause of Christ? What if God were waiting on us to live out this prophetic ending? What if the faithfulness of men could hasten the promise of God? What if this were true? And what if you are being called to embrace your crucial role in the Last Battle that will be talked about throughout eternity?

Luke 14 sets the conditions for what is required to be part of this story. It is a reckoning. We know that salvation is free—John 3:16 makes that clear. But our King is looking to and fro throughout the world for men who are willing to do more, the few who are willing to take the narrow road and embrace a daily bloody fight—a daily cross. Jesus tells us to not sign on the dotted line for this Last Battle until we “count the cost.” Christ describes a war where there will be no terms of peace, no treaties, and no retreats. We are given a vision of the overwhelming odds we inevitably will face:

“If you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

But don't begin until you count the cost. . . .

What king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? And if he can't, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away. So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything.”

—Luke 14:27–28, 31–33 NLT (emphasis mine)

To be such a victorious saint demands a willingness to give up everything. Would you, could you, be a saint? Is final victory and peace worth everything you have and own—even your very life?

Our King's call to arms is very clear and concise—*Come follow me, no matter the cost.*