

**SURVIVING**

*KILLING SIN*

**THE**

*BEFORE SIN*

**TRENCHES**

*KILLS YOU*

*JOE BARNARD*



# SURVIVING THE TRENCHES – A 10-WEEK CHALLENGE

## BY JOE BARNARD

### ORIENTATION

I don't need to tell you that you have an enemy. *You already know it.* Like me, every day you wake up to a battle with pride, lust, vanity, and sloth. The problem is not that the enemy is invisible. The problem is that the battle feels rigged. Personally, I'm frustrated by getting my teeth kicked in by sinful passions on a daily basis. *It doesn't have to be this way.*

Together we are embarking on a 10 week challenge. There are three objectives to this challenge:

1. We are going to shift your mindset regarding life. This is one of the great benefits of going through the book *Surviving the Trenches*. Ken Boa says, 'Much more than a how-to guide for dealing with sin, *Surviving the Trenches* will transform your mindset about sin from mere life-management and problem-solving to what sin really is—a life-or-death battlefield.'
2. We will equip you to fight two different types of battles against sin: (1) the daily skirmishes against temptation and (2) the long siege warfare against entrenched passions that have built fortifications within the heart.
3. We will deploy you and your 'band of brothers' to man the trenches *together* against an enemy that will not relent until Christ himself calls us home.

In the Royal Navy there is a saying: 'Si vis pacem, para bellum' (If you want peace, prepare for war). Men, I have one question for you as you begin this ten-week bootcamp. *Are you willing to prepare for war?*

### READING A BOOK IS NOT ENOUGH

Guys, let's be honest: Books don't change us. We can read an electrifying book about spiritual discipline and yet still press snooze on the alarm to skip a quiet time. We can sweep through a majestic account of the holiness of God and yet fidget like a toddler in the midst of Sunday worship. *Transformation requires more than downloading the thoughts of an intelligent writer.* Lasting change demands *doing*. Mere thinking – or just listening to podcasts on the commute home – will never be enough to push back the trenchline of sin. Something more is needed.

With this in mind, the *Surviving the Trenches* ten-week challenge entails more than just reading the book. There are three core elements of the challenge: (1) simple routines, (2) bodily discipline, and (3) spiritual friendship. Each element is essential in the war against sin. Without routines, we never establish the basic habits that promote spiritual growth; without bodily discipline, we leave ourselves dangerously exposed to temptation and sinful passions; and without spiritual friendship, we set ourselves up for failure. It will only be as *all three elements* of this challenge take shape in our lives that we will begin to feel growing strength to push back the assaults of pride, lust, vanity, and sloth.

## Core Elements Of The 10 Week Challenge

Simple Routines	Bodily Discipline	Spiritual Friendship
<p>Spend 15 minutes in the morning memorizing Romans 6:5-14.</p> <p><b>Goal:</b> Be able to recite 1 new verse each week until men can recite the whole passage from memory.</p>	<p>Get to bed by 10:30 P.M.</p> <p><b>Remember:</b> The devil is most active when we are most tired.</p>	<p>Meet as a small group once a week to discuss sections of the book.</p> <p><b>Further instructions:</b> For tips on how to lead a group meeting, visit the 'additional resources' page at <a href="http://www.survivingthetrenches.men">www.survivingthetrenches.men</a></p>
<p>Spend 15 minutes in the evening reading <i>Surviving the Trenches</i>.</p> <p><b>Goal:</b> Complete the book.</p>	<p>Wake up by 6:00 A.M.</p> <p><b>Remember:</b> Morning is the best time for memorization and prayer.</p>	<p>Set up a text group or WhatsApp group to stay in daily communication with your band of brothers.</p>
<p>Go to church on Sundays.</p> <p><b>Remember:</b> Killing sin begins with practicing the fundamentals of the Christian faith.</p>	<p>Adopt a simple form of digital minimalism.</p> <p><b>Further instructions:</b> Visit the 'additional resources' page at <a href="http://www.survivingthetrenches.men">www.survivingthetrenches.men</a></p>	<p>For further ideas about building a spiritual band of brothers, listen to Season 1 of the Cross Training podcast.</p>
<p>Keep a journal logging specific temptations.</p> <p><b>Further instructions:</b> Visit the 'additional resources' page at <a href="http://www.survivingthetrenches.men">www.survivingthetrenches.men</a></p>	<p>Set a personal threshold for consumption of TV and video games for the duration of this program.<sup>1</sup></p>	

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1. **What is a personal threshold?** In order to be responsible before God, a man must live with a sense of boundaries. There is nothing wrong with watching television, playing video games, having a beer, or eating ice cream. However, too much of any of these things will end up reducing a man's capacity to serve Jesus. Setting up a personal threshold is a way of living within boundaries without falling into the ditch of legalism. For example, a man can decide that he can watch an hour of TV on weeknights, but no more. This kind of personal limit enables a man to enjoy God-given freedom without succumbing to unmeasured indulgence.

## **ITINERARY**

Week 1 – Orientation

Week 2 – The first 5 rules of war

Week 3 – The second 5 rules of war

Week 4 – Fighting Negligence

Week 5 – Fighting Indifference

Week 6 – Fighting Rebellion

Week 7 – Fighting Despair

Week 8 – The War against Entrenched Sin

Week 9 – Killing Vanity and Sloth

Week 10 – Killing Lust and Pride

Deployment

# Week 1 – Orientation

*For this week, have group members read pages 9-20. Use this session to get to know the men in the group and to prepare them for the journey ahead.*

**Opening Activity:** hand out pieces of paper to everyone in the group. Give men 5 minutes to write down everything they have been taught about fighting sin. Go around and share the results. Ask the following questions:

- Why is there so little direct and honest teaching about the topic of fighting sin?
- Why are Christian men in general so pessimistic about the fight against sin?
- How does despair affect your own battle against sinful passions?
- Have you ever experienced victory over a sinful passion (not just forgiveness, but a real sense of freedom from oppression)? Describe the battle.
- How would you describe 'success' in the battle against sin? What can we honestly hope for? *Avoid all 'Sunday school' answers.*

**Have Each Group Member Identify His Typical Sin-Fighting Posture:**

- **Street Brawler:** no method or plan, just an occasional burst of action when you're finally fed up.
- **Perpetual Strategist:** you have a clear intellectual understanding of what should be done (i.e. first class theology and doctrine), but you rarely put such knowledge into practice. The battle exists on paper, not in real life.
- **Spectator:** fighting sin is something you've read about in the Bible, but you've never jumped into the battle yourself.
- **Slave:** you feel under the power and sway of sin. In fact, you feel as if you are fighting on the wrong side. Rather than working with the Holy Spirit, you tend to submit to the rule of temptation and sinful passions *most of the time.*
- **Infantryman:** you know the enemy and are committed to the battle. Some days you see the forces of sin pushed back a little; other days, you lose ground. However, you're in the battle and looking for any support and training you can get.

**Identifying a Target**

- If you could automatically have victory over one particular sinful passion (lust, greed, vanity, pride, envy, anger, sloth, gluttony, etc.), which one would you choose? Why?
- How would your life be different if you were free of the tyranny of this deadly sin?

## Week 2 – The First Five Rules of War

For this week, have group members read pages 21-33.

### Rule 1: You Need the Holy Spirit

- Read Romans 8:2 and 8:13. Why do we need the Holy Spirit in order to fight sin? Avoid ‘Sunday School’ answers. Think specifically. How does the Holy Spirit arm us for war against sin?
- Read Isaiah 57:15 and Psalm 51:17. Why is it that the battle against sin starts with a spirit of humility?

### Rule 2: You Need to Know Your Location

The book says, ‘Now, for killing sin, nothing is more important than getting an accurate read on where we are situated before God. One of Satan’s favorite tactics is to convince us that we are walking on the boggy ground of condemnation and guilt when in fact we are standing on the solid rock of grace and forgiveness’ (p. 26-27).

- What does Romans 6:11 reveal about our relationship with sin?
- What does Romans 8:1 reveal about our relationship with sin?

### Rule 3: You Need to Practice the Normal Christian Life

The book says, ‘Killing sin always begins with the mundane, not the extraordinary. If a man wants to snuff the coals of lust or anger, the first step is not a silent retreat, but something far simpler: sitting under a faithful ministry of the Word, committing to a local fellowship, budgeting time for spiritual friendship and communal worship, and establishing personal routines of Word and prayer’ (p. 28).

- Why is the normal Christian life so important in the fight against sin?
- Why are a lot of men so negligent in terms of practicing what theologians call ‘the ordinary means of grace?’

### Rule 4: You Need a Zero-Tolerance Attitude

- The book says, ‘The only way to fight any one sin is to fight all sin’ (p. 31). Why is this? Why can’t we just focus on the big sins, the ones that we feel are most dangerous or disruptive?
- The book says, ‘The only way to fight big sins is to fight small ones’ (p. 31). How are big sins and small sins related to each other? What do they ultimately have in common?

### Rule 5: You Need to Be All-In

‘As soon as life is compartmentalized, we end up tolerating attitudes and behavior in one segment of life that we would never permit in another. It becomes okay to talk about women in a locker room in a manner that would be shameful at a Bible study. Such inconsistency needs to be labeled for what it is, *hypocrisy*’ (p. 32).

- How does Romans 12:1 protect us from compartmentalizing our lives into ‘spiritual areas of life’ and ‘secular areas of life?’
- What do you think it means to be ‘all-in’ in the battle against sin?

**Group Accountability:** Remind everyone of the core elements of this 10 week challenge (the simple routines, bodily discipline, and spiritual friendship). Most importantly, make sure that group members are doing the memory work. The Word of God is an irreplaceable weapon against sin.

## Week 3 – The Second Five Rules of War

For this week, have group members read pages 33-45.

### Rule 6: You Need to Play Strong Defense

‘No sin has any right over us. Its power is only by permission. It is only if we allow sin to be our master that we find ourselves doing its bidding’ (p. 33).

- Read Romans 6:12. How does this verse reinforce the truth that, if we want to fight against sin, we need to play strong defense?
- The book says, ‘If we want to enjoy liberty, we need to put up resistance. It is only if we are willing to say, ‘No!’ to sin that the momentum of sin begins to stall’ (p. 33). What are the barriers that keep us from putting up resistance against sin?

### Rule 7: You Need to Play Even Stronger Offense

‘Defense *alone* will never smother the life of sin. Unless we are pursuing holiness, avoiding sinfulness will be of little use’ (p. 36).

- The book says, ‘Men must exert as much effort into putting on virtue as they do in putting off vice’ (p. 36). Why is this? How is pursuing holiness connected to killing sin?
- Read Romans 6:13. What does it mean to present ‘your members as instruments for righteousness?’ How do we practically do this?

### Rule 8: You Need to Be Radical

‘Men must realize that radical change is not just required for some sin; radical change is required for all sin. If we are not willing to cut off obvious supply lines to evil passions, then we cannot expect the strength of these passions to be diminished over time’ (p. 39).

- Read Romans 13:14. What are some of the ways that men ‘make provision for the flesh?’
- What would it look like for you to change your environment to reduce the severity of temptation?
- The book says, ‘It is not uncommon that underlying a long pattern of sin is an old, untended wound’ (p. 39). Why is it that Christian counseling is often an important part of the fight against sin?

### Rule 9: You Need Absolute Trust

- Why is it dangerous to trust our own perspective while we are fighting against sin? How is God’s vision of the battle often different from ours? (Read 2 Corinthians 12:10 for encouragement.)

### Rule 10: Never Give Up

- Read Romans 6:14. Why is it important to remember that this verse is a promise?
- How can Christian brothers encourage one another to never give up the fight against sin?

**Group Accountability:** Remind everyone of the core elements of this 10 week challenge. Check-in with group members to see how they are doing with their simple routines, bodily discipline, and spiritual friendship.



## Week 4 – Fighting Negligence

*For this week, have group members read pages 47-55.*

### **The Path to Deception**

- The book says, ‘The path to sin – at least deep sin – is far more like drifting in a current than being cajoled to jump off of a diving board’ (p. 49). How have you experienced this in your own life?
- How is the deception of sin like the deception of propaganda (or even advertising)?

### **Lie 1: ‘I can linger at the doorstep of sin.’**

- The book says, ‘Avoiding temptation is always easier than resisting temptation.’ What are some ways that men set themselves up to fail in the fight against sin?
- Name a recent situation in your life when you foolishly played around with temptation. What was the end result?

### **Lie 2: ‘I can manage my sin.’**

- Why do a lot of Christian men think that they can contain the spread of sin in their lives?
- How does the life of David provide a case-study in the danger of thinking that we can contain the collateral damage – and spread – of sin in our lives?
- The book says, ‘Sin is not something to be managed; it is something to be killed’ (54). What do you think it means to kill sin?

### **Lie 3: ‘There is no hook in the bait.’**

- Sin often looks appealing at first sight. What can we do in order to be mindful of the danger that lies hidden within a dangling temptation?
- The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). What does this mean? How are the wages of sin death?

**Group Accountability:** When bodily discipline is present, negligence retreats. Have group members review their commitments to bodily discipline. Ask questions such as the following: (1) which of the bodily disciplines has been the biggest struggle for you? (2) How has a renewed focus on bodily discipline prepared you to fight against sin?

# Week 5 – Fighting Indifference

*For this week, have group members read pages 55-61.*

## **Defining Indifference**

- What does it mean to be indifferent about the sin in our lives?
- What are some symptoms that indicate that a mindset of indifference regarding sin has overtaken us?

## **Lie 1: ‘I could do worse.’**

- How have you used this excuse to justify sin in your life? Give some examples.
- The book says, ‘The measure of a sin is never how far it is from the basement of Hell, but how far it is from the ceiling of Heaven’ (p. 56). Why is it important to judge sin by the standards of holiness rather than by the norms of human behavior?
- We sometimes feel as if we are doing God a favor by committing a ‘minor’ sin rather than a ‘major’ one. What should we do when this attitude creeps into our hearts?

## **Lie 2: ‘This makes me happy.’**

- We constantly hear the message in our culture that, in order to be happy, we need ‘to follow our hearts.’ Why is this message so dangerous?
- Read Jeremiah 17:9, Hebrews 3:13, and I Peter 2:11. What vital lesson do these verses teach us?

## **Lie 3: ‘All men struggle with X.’**

- Page 58 outlines a situation in which an accountability group ends up being counterproductive. Instead of sin being resisted, sin ends up being normalized. How can small groups be safe places where men can confess sin honestly without lapsing into circles of affirmation where sin is normalized?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Hebrews 4:12-13. How can these verses wake us up from the stupor of feeling indifferent about our sin?

## **Lie 4: ‘It’s not my fault.’**

- What are some circumstances in which men may feel as if their sin is not their fault?
- Psychological pain often feeds sinful habits. Sexual abuse, for example, often leaves a festering wound that drives men into various forms of addictive behavior. Why is it important that men – even in the midst of deep psychological pain – do not say to themselves, ‘I am not responsible for my sin.’?
- Often Christian counseling, or some form of pastoral care, will be required to help men find freedom from sin that is fed by psychological wounds. How does a man figure out if he is in need of some form of counseling? How does he discern whether deep pain is contributing to repeated temptation?

**Group Accountability:** It is difficult to be indifferent about sin when you are in the trenches with friends who are putting sin to death. Evaluate the quality of your spiritual friendships. How could you improve your band of brothers in order to make sure that no man is lapsing into indifference?

# Week 6 – Fighting Rebellion

*For this week, have group members read pages 61-65.*

## **Defining Rebellion**

- How is rebellion different from indifference or negligence?
- Read Hebrews 10:26-31. Why is rebellion so dangerous?

## **Lie 1: ‘God is all love and no justice.’**

- Why do so many men struggle to believe that God is as just and holy as He is loving and merciful?
- Read Galatians 6:7-8. How do these verses warn us against ignoring the justice of God?

## **Lie 2: ‘Repentance is easy.’**

- How do men use repentance as a pretext for sinful behavior? Think of an example when you deliberately chose a sinful path because you told yourself, ‘I can always repent afterwards.’
- The book says, ‘Anyone who believes that repentance is easy has never actually repented. The heart is made of a quick-drying cement that hardens in an instant but takes hours, days – sometimes years – to break’ (p. 63). How do we see this truth illustrated in the Bible? What examples can you think of that demonstrate the danger of a heart that has been hardened by sin?

## **Lie 3: ‘Sin is already paid for.’**

- The book says, ‘Sin wants us to lose sight of the fact that a living and breathing man named Jesus actually had nails driven through His hands in order to pay the penalty of our sin’ (p. 64). Why is it important to remember that Jesus suffered for our sins? How will this realization protect us from taking forgiveness for granted?
- Do a quick Google search for the old hymn by Isaac Watts, ‘Infinite Grief, Amazing Woe!’ Read the hymn aloud. How does this hymn protect us from using the sacrifice of Jesus as a pretext for sin?

## **Lie 4: ‘No one can see.’**

- What does the following Proverb mean: ‘The fool says in his heart there is no God’ (Prov. 14:1)?
- Read Hebrews 4:13. What difference would it make if we lived with an abiding consciousness of being in the presence of a Holy God?

**Group Accountability:** Simple routines can help us fight against a rebellious spirit. Revisit the simple routines that are a part of this 10 week program. Ask the following questions: (1) which routine has been most difficult to keep? (2) How can simple routines like these protect a man against the encroachment of a rebellious spirit?

# Week 7 – Fighting Despair

*For this week, have group members read pages 65-74.*

## **Defining Despair**

- The book describes ‘the feedback loop of sin and despair’ (p. 65-66). Think of a time when you were caught in the current of this deception. How did despair feed an entrenched pattern of sinful behavior?
- How is despair like being locked in a cage? What are the best remedies for getting out of the cage when we feel locked in by despair?

## **Lie 1: ‘I am too far gone.’**

- How does the story of Peter’s denial of Christ teach us that we are never too far gone to be forgiven by God?
- How is the example of Judas a warning against giving despair a foothold in our hearts?

## **Lie 2: ‘God is more just than merciful.’**

- How does the cross uniquely reveal that God’s justice and mercy are equally infinite?
- What should we do when our fear of God’s justice inhibits our willingness to draw near to Him and ask Him for forgiveness?
- Men tend to flip-flop between fixating on the love of God and the holiness of God. One second we focus exclusively on the mercy of God; another on the justice of God. How do we maintain a correct vision of God such that his love and holiness are both kept equally and simultaneously in view?

## **Lie 3: ‘My sin is my savior.’**

- How is the logic of repeated sin similar to the logic of addictive behavior? How is pain often a trigger for both?
- What should we do when we are relying on some form of sinful behavior to cope with a deep pain or agonizing thirst within our souls?

**Group Accountability:** Reciting Scripture can protect a man from drowning in despair. Make sure that group members are progressing in their memory work. One of the core objectives of this 10 week challenge is to memorize Romans 6:5-14. Ask group members the following question: How has daily meditation on this passage helped you in your fight against sin?

# Week 8 – The War against Entrenched Sin

For this week, have group members read pages 75-99.

## Introduction

- The book says, ‘Repentance often feels like siege warfare. The process can be slow – *painfully slow*’ (p. 77). How did this chapter change the way that you think about repentance?

## Stage 1: Detect – Build Awareness

- The book says, ‘For every busted pipe that floods the heart, there will be any number of slight leaks that never get noticed. It is often these more subtle drips that over time cause the greatest damage’ (p. 79). What can men do to build awareness of the presence and movement of sin in their hearts?
- What barriers exist that keep men from being more attuned to the presence and movement of sin in their hearts?

## Stage 2: Reflect – Get Sanity

- This section of the book introduces the idea of journaling in order to capture intelligence regarding the activity of sin in the heart (c.f. p. 86). How can using a journal help us to identify both the deep roots of sin and also the lies that feed sin?
- Why is it important to take time to identify the deep roots of sin and the lies that feed sin?

## Stage 3: Reject – Tap into a Deeper Love

- Read Matthew 6:22-23. How do these verses remind us of the fundamental difficulty of entrenched sin? In other words, how does sin affect our perception of reality?
- The book suggests that, in order to reject sin, men need to meditate on the danger, guilt, and evil of sin. Why is such meditation needed?
- The book says, ‘Hatred of sin is not sufficient in and of itself to break the spell of sin. For this, love of holiness is required’ (p. 92). In order to kill sinful passions, why do we need to move beyond meditating on the ugliness of sin to meditating on the beauty of God? Why is this shift of attention needed?
- Describe the breakthrough of ‘Steve’ on p. 95. What is the climactic moment of repentance? Why is a long journey often required to reach this moment?

## Stage 4: Correct – Act on Faith

- The book says, ‘Where does all of this end? After we have asked for mercy, are we done? Do we simply sit passively and wait on supernatural strength to quicken us like Sampson waiting for his hair to grow? The answer is, ‘No.’ The spirit of trust is far more daring than this. While we wait on mercy, we do not sit still like a driver waiting for a tow truck. Rather, believing that grace is already on the way, we get busy doing all of the various things that God has already told us need to be done’ (p. 99). *What are the ordinary things we can be doing to kill sin while we wait for the grace of God to strengthen us?*

**Group Accountability:** Ask group members if they have been keeping a temptation journal. Find out how this practice has helped them in their fight against sin.

## Week 9 – Killing Vanity and Sloth

For this week, have group members read pages 101-117.

### Target 1: Vanity

- What evidence do you see of vanity in your life?
- How are discontentment, busyness, hypocrisy, and shame all symptoms of vanity? Discuss each one separately.
- Why is vanity such a dangerous passion? What will be the dangerous consequences of leaving vanity unmortified?
- How can meditating on the Day of Judgment help us to fight back against vanity? How does *that day* shift our perception of what has value and significance?
- The book says, 'God has made us with a need to be loved and be found lovely. This need is not sinful. It only becomes sinful when we seek our identity in the wrong community and when we seek our worth in the wrong activity. The key to overcoming vanity, then, is not to try to kill these desires, but rather to seek to fulfill them according to our true design' (p. 109). How do we go about fulfilling our needs for identity and belonging so that there is no room for vanity to take root in our hearts?

### Target 2: Sloth

- Try to give a definition of the sinful passion of sloth. How would you explain this passion to a friend?
- The book says, 'Sloth is a gateway drug to other hole-filling sins' (p. 113). How does a permissive attitude toward sloth leave us vulnerable to other sinful passions like greed, lust, and gluttony?
- Boredom, busyness, emptiness, amusing ourselves constantly, and mediocrity are all symptoms of sloth. Which of these do you see evidence of in your own life?
- What does it mean to play stiff defense against the encroachment of sloth?
- The book says, 'In terms of offense, the best way to kill sloth is through a committed pursuit of spiritual disciplines' (p. 117). How do spiritual disciplines like prayer, fellowship, corporate worship, and meditating on the Scriptures assist us in putting sloth to death?

**Group Accountability:** Don't just talk about sin; confess sin to one another. Ask group members where they see vanity and sloth in their lives. Pray for one another.

## Week 10 – Killing Pride and Lust

*For this week, have group members read pages 118-131 as well as reread pages 69-74.*

### Target 3 – Lust

- The book says, ‘Lust is the attitude that reduces another person to his or her sexual value’ (p. 118). How is learning to respect the God-given dignity of each and every woman an important part of killing lust?
- Read Romans 13:14. What practical steps can men take to remove any provision they are allowing for lust?
- Read Matthew 6:22. What must men do to purify the eyes of the heart? How is beholding the beauty of holiness connected to putting lust to death?
- Scan through pages 69-74. How can we use the advice in the section ‘The Path to Watchfulness’ in order to fight aggressively against the encroachment of lust?

### Target 4 – Pride

- What’s the difference between pride and vanity? (For help, see footnote 1 on p. 103.)
- Pages 122-124 describe the process by which our culture feeds an attitude of self-centeredness. How have you been affected by the influences mentioned in these pages?
- Anger, self-worship, greed, and envy are all clear symptoms of pride. What symptoms do you see of pride being entrenched in your heart?
- Read through the famous hymn by Robert Murray M’Cheyne on page 127. How can reflecting on this hymn help us to combat the pride that so readily grows in our hearts?
- Review the image of Steve’s notebook on page 91. How can this notebook help you in your fight against pride?

**Group Accountability:** Don’t just talk about sin; confess sin to one another. Ask group members where they see lust and pride in their lives. Pray for one another.

# Deployment

NEXT STEP: SIGN UP FOR CT 12

A lot of men struggle to grow spiritually because they don't have a plan for growth. CT 12 is a 12 week program by Cross Training Ministries that focuses on simple routines, bodily discipline, and spiritual friendship. Men who do this program will not only be helped in developing good habits that promote spiritual growth, but they will also be helped in breaking bad habits that impede spiritual growth.

You can find out more about this program at [www.menneedhelp.org](http://www.menneedhelp.org).