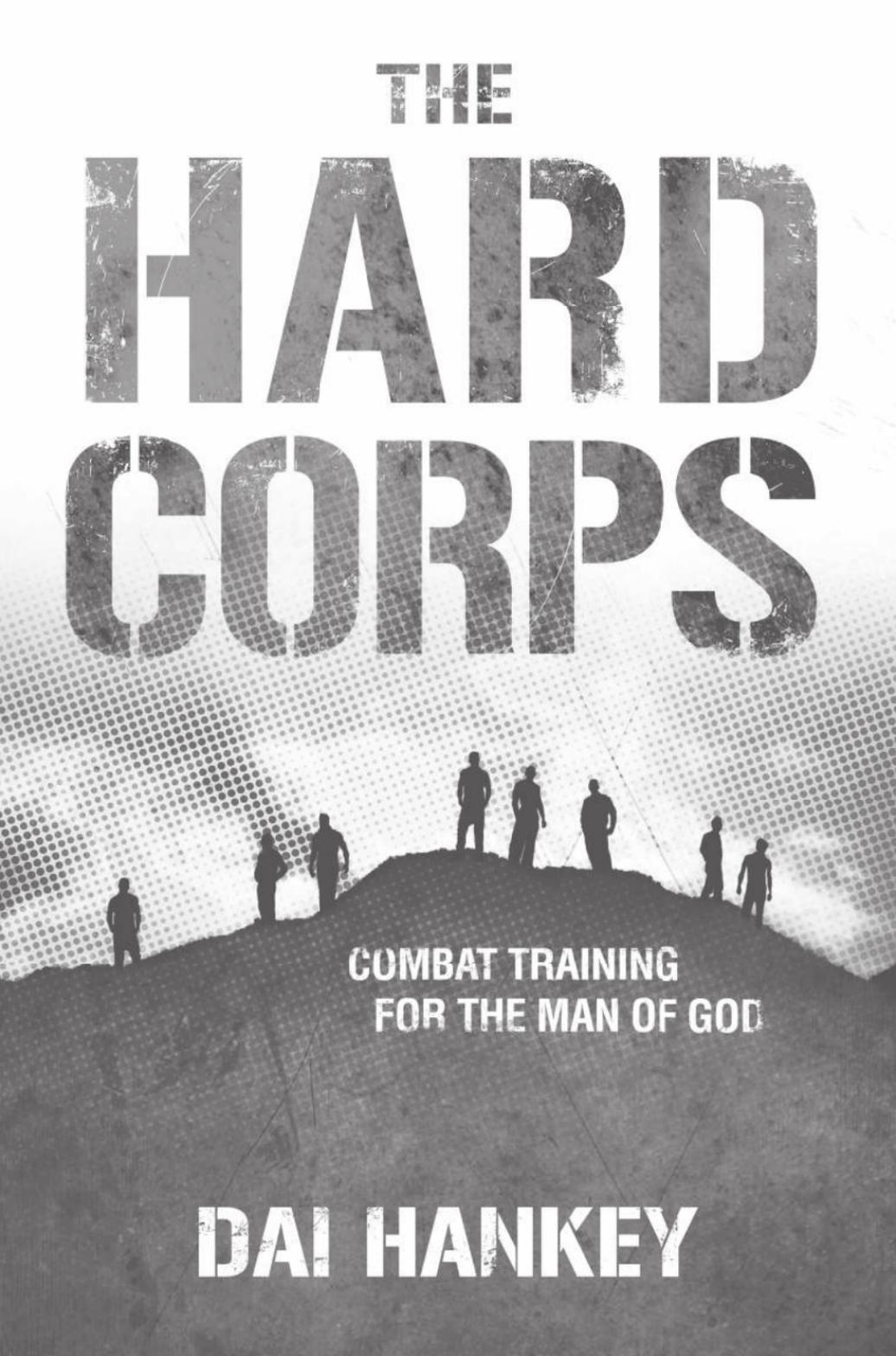


THE HARD CORPS



COMBAT TRAINING
FOR THE MAN OF GOD

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The Hard Corps

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This book is dedicated to the following:

My dad

For teaching me to embrace adventure, face my fears and be strong in the Lord.

My brothers in Christ

Every man who has ever stood with me, battled alongside me, prayed for me, encouraged me, challenged me, inspired me and pointed me to Jesus. You know who you are!

My sons, Josiah and Ezra:

I love you so much. I pray that the King of all kings will capture your hearts and raise you up as mighty gospel warriors who will do great exploits in His name and for His glory.

INTRO

So the other day I was chillin' on my sofa when my three-year-old son, Josiah, came and stood in front of me demanding my attention. He was sporting a bizarre multi-coloured contraption on his head that he had meticulously hand-crafted out of Popoids¹. I think it was a crown. Or maybe a helmet. In his hand was a smaller Popoid creation that he informed me was a radio—though it later took on a new identity as an octopus.

"Daddy, I'm a soldier of Jesus!" he enthusiastically announced.

Oh boy!

Truth is, as nuts as he looked, deep down I was buzzin' that in my little boy's whacky world of crazy play he was, in his own unique way, wanting to line up in the ranks of the army of the King of kings.

That's my greatest desire for him, as it is for all my kids.

However, one day Joey is going to wake up and realise that if he's going to fight for King Jesus, he'll need to be armed

¹ Popoids is a colourful plastic construction kit for kids that consists of weird shapes that can be connected by pipes that bend, twist and click together.

with more than quirky, home-made plastic weapons... even if they do have the ability to miraculously transform into octopuses!

He's going to grow up in a world at war with God. A world that is hell-bent on distracting him from the cause of Jesus, the power of the gospel and the hope of glory.

The reality is that the relentless pressures that my sons are going to face as they grow up are the same ones that are assailing you and me right now—the pressure to conform, to be accepted, to prove yourself, to please yourself, to do whatever it takes to earn love and respect.

The solution, however, isn't to bubble wrap them and hide them away from the horrors of war. Rather, it's to train them to fight and to prevail. To model what it is to be a true man of God. A soldier of Jesus.

So what does that kind of man look like?

Well, the good news is that, contrary to popular belief, there's not a single verse in the Bible to suggest that when a man starts to follow Christ he has to hand in his testicles at the door. Far from it. Scripture teaches that men should be strong, adventurous and willing to fight for what matters! As such we should seek to emulate the heroes of the Bible, who were passionate, courageous, uncompromising, and spiritually solid.

Who are these heroes?

Obviously the greatest example is Jesus Himself—the über hero. It's impossible not to be impressed by Him, both as the cross-carrying King of mercy, and also the exalted King of heaven, who rules the universe with an iron bar and a fist full of stars. All other heroes pale into insignificance next to Him. However, there are plenty of other men in the pages of Scripture who can also get the blood pumping and get faith levels rising.

Among my personal favourites are David's Mighty Men (*a.k.a. The Hard Corps*)—a platoon of elite soldiers who served their king with both devotion and distinction.

Their stories are hidden away in some of the more obscure pages of the Old Testament², yet these guys were the real deal. These men lived, loved and fought with such intensity that I defy any man to not be inspired by them. Such were their heroics they were rightly lauded as legends in their own lifetime, and even today they still have plenty to teach us about what it means to be true men of God.

The purpose of this book is therefore to spend time in the trenches with these incredible warriors. To study them, learn from them and better understand what makes them tick. We'll be meeting individual soldiers, going on mission with a special ops unit, and honouring the remarkable legacy that these great men left behind.

At the end of each encounter you will be given the opportunity to engage in a series of Combat Training sessions³ that will further equip you to press on and fight as these men fought. Similarly, at the back of the book is the Armoury where you will discover a vast array of resources with which you can arm yourself for the battles that lie ahead.

My prayer is that by the time you've reached the end of this book, there will be no holding you back from launching into some serious, sanctified, no-holds-barred righteous ruckus for Jesus!

Man of God—It's time to put down the Popoids.
Welcome to *The Hard Corps*.

2 The two main passages that chart the adventures of David's Mighty Men are 2 Samuel 23 v 8-39 and 1 Chronicles 11 v 10-47. For the sake of simplicity we will be focussing mainly on the passage in 2Samuel.

3 Combat Training sessions are great for individual study but are also perfect for groups of men who are wanting to get trained up and built together in the gospel.

CHAPTER 1

SET YOUR FACE



**DEFYING THE ODDS WITH JOSHEB-BASSHEBETH
WARRIOR OF FAITH**

**"NEVER GIVE ME
THE ODDS."**

HAN SOLO

Jason Bourne.

James Bond.

Jack Bauer.

How come so many action heroes own the initials JB? Whatever the reason I guarantee that the JB you're about to meet makes all those other guys look like *the Care Bears!*

These are the names of the mighty men whom David had:

Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite; he was chief of the three...

2 Samuel 23 v 8

Josheb-Basshebeth (JB) might sound like the sort of name that you'd only give to a child if you lost a bet or were high on drugs, but trust me—no-one ever made fun of this guy! JB was King David's ultimate warrior and one of the hardest men in the whole Bible.

David had a huge army with literally hundreds of thousands of highly-skilled soldiers who would have laid down their lives for him in a heartbeat. As well as these regular troops, however, he also had *The Hard Corps*—an elite squad of military specialists whose loyalty and warcraft was unparalleled. These Mighty Men were divided into two units: the Thirty and the Three. While the Thirty were exceptional, the Three were sensational! These three warriors were the cream of the corps—the best of the best!

And JB wasn't just one of the Three—he was the chief!

You could have searched the world over for a more gifted and more respected soldier but you would have never found one. JB was simply that good! You don't get to be one of the Three, let alone the boss, unless you've proved your worth on the battlefield.

Soldiers have always had to earn their stripes. So what exactly had JB done to get promoted to this position of honour? No doubt he had fought faithfully and courageously at the king's side on countless occasions and played his part in winning numerous battles. However, the Bible records none of those things. It focuses on one particular feat that illustrates perfectly just why he claimed the status as the number One of the Three. If you liked the film *300*—you're going to love this:

He wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he killed at one time. **verse 8**

JB took out 800 enemy soldiers in one epic stand-off.

ON HIS OWN!!!

That's incredible—*simple as*.

We don't know whether they all jumped him together and got wiped out in one mass rumble, or whether he had them form a line and took them out one by one. Either way you've got to admit that it's impressive.

And don't forget this wasn't a modern soldier armed with an assault rifle and hand-grenades—JB pulled this off with a single spear! Basically, he was a soldier like no other, who stood strong, fought ferociously and overcame impossible odds to win a victory that still causes jaws to drop today!

Now I appreciate that we don't often find ourselves surrounded by legions of heavily-armed, bloodthirsty warriors whose sole purpose is to bring an abrupt and brutal end to

our lives, so what exactly can we learn from the example of Josheb-basshebeth? Why did God cause his story to be written down for us to read 3000 years later?

Maybe He wants us to be men who, like JB, defy the odds.

Defy the odds

When it comes to facing overwhelming odds I am something of an expert. As a father of four beautifully bonkers kids¹ I am permanently outnumbered! The Hankey horde love nothing more than ganging up on me, wrestling me to the ground and proceeding to batter me with whatever weapons they can lay their hands on—cushions, toys, furniture, the dog... There are no rules and there is certainly no mercy! They may just be kids, but there's a LOT of them!²

Truth is, I never stand a chance.

That might be a light-hearted illustration, but let's not kid ourselves—as Christian men who love Jesus and are committed to doing life His way, we are seriously outnumbered! Forget odds of 4:1 or even 800:1, it can sometimes feel as if the whole world is against us. Everywhere we turn we are confronted by a culture that is fundamentally opposed to the cause of Christ, and as Christians we are in the minority.

As Christian men we are even more marginalised—we're even outnumbered in church!

When I played for our local football team I was the only Christian in the changing room—relentlessly bombarded by tales of drunkenness, crime and sexual conquest. As a club DJ I constantly felt like the only person in the venue who wasn't mashed off my face on pills.

I'm fully aware that, as you read this, you may well be the

1 At the time of writing I have a 5-year old, a 3-year old and a crazy pair of 1s!

2 Without doubt their most savage tactic is the "stinky face". This involves pinning me down on the floor and inciting one of the twins with a freshly soiled nappy to sit on my face and wiggle around. It's nothing short of domestic terrorism!

only follower of Jesus in your workplace, school, college, hall of residence, sports team, family or community. I know first-hand how hard it can be to stand up and be counted in such circumstances, let alone feel that you're making any kind of difference. To rep for Jesus these days you need to be a full-on gospel renegade, adopting a lifestyle of radical cultural defiance. Alice Cooper was spot-on when he said:

"Drinking beer is easy. Trashing your hotel room is easy. But being a Christian, that's a tough call. That's real rebellion."

Which is why I'm so inspired by JB.

As I read it, when JB came face to face with 800 savage opponents, there were only three options available to him:

1. He could run away and hide.
2. He could drop his weapon and surrender, or
3. He could take a deep breath, tighten his grip on his spear and charge full-force into the face of adversity!

When it comes to living for Jesus, we are faced with the same three options today.

1. Cowardice

We could just turn our backs on the carnage of the battlefield and beat a hasty retreat to the "safety" of our cosy Christian bubbles, drowning out the sound of the horrors of war by singing soppy love songs to Jesus.

Sadly, there are many in our churches who take this option—comfort over combat. But this is not what soldiers of Christ are called to do. We were enlisted into the army of the King to be soldiers who stand and fight in the name of Jesus, not to cower in the shadows like a bunch of weak-kneed pansies!

God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

2 Timothy 1 v 7

Man of God—you were NOT called to be cowards.

You were called to fight!

2. Compromise

Alternatively, if the thought of pain, hard work and spilling blood on your clothes really doesn't appeal to you, there's always option 2. This is to surrender to the advancing army before a single blow has been struck— if you can't beat them, join them!

Tragically, this is the option that far too many Christian men are opting for these days. It simply involves rejecting the costly life of faith and bowing to the pressure to go along with whatever everyone else is doing! Fast-living, tough-talking, hard-drinking, fist-swinging, womanising, wealth-worshipping, porn-obsessed men have no place in the ranks of the army of Christ.

But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.

1 Timothy 6 v 11-12

Man of God— you were NOT called to compromise.

You were called to fight!

3. Combat

Clearly neither cowardice nor compromise were in JB's vocabulary. He was only ever going to take option 3—stepping up to the plate and doing what he did best—letting loose

and kicking butt! And if we're honest we can't help but be inspired by the guts he showed and the stand he took.

However, there is a huge difference between applauding the heroics of King David's mightiest warrior and actually following in his footsteps! I mean how on earth do we actually stand and fight like that in our own context today?

Perhaps we need to stop the testosterone pumping for just a moment and come back to reality. The bottom line is this—*in ourselves we haven't got what it takes to stand.*

As men we don't like to admit this, but it is the raw truth. All of us at some point have crumbled in the heat of conflict and are painfully aware of our failure to fight and prevail. You might even be reading this right now and feeling a deep sense of shame as you recall your own moments of weakness and defeat.

I wish I could write as a man who has only ever stood strong against all odds as a faithful soldier of Christ. But I can't. I could put on a mask and make out like I've never joined in with inappropriate banter, that I've never been guilty of the lustful second glance, that I've never come home after an evening out with the boys gutted that I'd dishonoured Jesus and blown my witness (again). But it would be fake.

Truth is, I write as a man who, like you, has a chunky back-catalogue of sin and disgrace.

I'll share more about my past and the grace that rescued me from it in a later chapter. For now, let's just agree that as men we need to be more than just inspired to live for Jesus.

We need to be empowered!

JB's secret

So what was JB's secret? Where did his power come from? While it might be tempting to attribute his great achievements on the battlefield to his remarkable bravery, military

skill or physical stature, I believe that his power came from a quite different source.

His secret was God.

JB clearly loved his king and fought faithfully for him.

And when you fight for King David, you fight for David's King!

David was a man whose heart was captivated by his King. A man who was both gripped and moved by the super power of God's Spirit. A man to whom God had promised great victory and immense blessing. A man who rolled with the Almighty and was so sure of his presence with him that it made him feel invincible. If you need convincing of that, check out these lyrics that David wrote:

For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.

2 Samuel 22 v 30

Simply knowing that God was fighting both *with* him and *for* him made him bold enough to take on an entire troop single-handedly (and bust a bit of *parkour*³ on the way home too!) That's because David was more focused on God's superior power, than the comparatively inferior threat posed by those who stood against him. Furthermore, David held firm to God's promises. God had promised him success. David fought like it was true!

David had success in all his undertakings, for the LORD was with him.

1 Samuel 18 v 14

By lining up alongside King David, JB was aligning him-

³ *Parkour* is that thing where guys leap over walls and through windows—like Daniel Craig as another JB—James Bond—in the opening scene of the movie *Casino Royale*.

self with the God of the universe. And when God's on your team—the odds look totally different:

800:1 = certain death.
800:1 + God = no contest!

It's all about perspective.

If we look to our own strength and abilities to stand, we'll soon be found wanting and get annihilated in no time. Similarly, if we focus on the ruckus that rages all around us, we'll quickly freak out and give up!

However, if we look beyond those things that are set *against* us—and fix our gaze on the awesome God who is *for* us—it changes everything. Paul calls this “*walking by faith and not by sight*” (2 Corinthians 5 v 7).

Just stop for a minute and remember again who it is that's on our team:

the LORD is with me as a dread warrior...

Dread warrior has got to go down as one of the most awesome descriptions of God in the whole of Scripture. And check out the dread warrior in action:

The LORD goes out like a mighty man,
like a man of war he stirs up his zeal;
he cries out, he shouts aloud,
he shows himself mighty against his foes.

Isaiah 42 v 13

God is ROCK HARD!

He's immortal, immense, unrivaled and unstoppable!

This mighty warrior is none other than King Jesus himself—the one who set His face to crush sin and Satan on

the cross, before rising from the dead and obliterating the greatest enemy of all—death itself. Because of what Jesus has done, the battle is already won:

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15 v 57

Men who *don't* look to Jesus will always face defeat, whereas men who are fixated by Jesus fight like they're unbeatable—because they are!

Jesus is the One who fought for king David.

He's the One who fought for JB.

He's the One who fights for us.

That's a phenomenal truth! Jesus doesn't just *make* the difference, *he is the difference*.

So what?

If the example of Josheb-basshebeth has given you a fresh desire to man up and step up for your King, to defy all odds and do great exploits in His name—you need to be *sharpening your faith, not your spear!* You need to look to Jesus and see Him as greater than anyone or anything that stands in your way.

If you feel unworthy to fight due to past failures or indwelling weaknesses—you need to come back to the cross and see Jesus laying the smack-down on ALL your sin, setting you free to fight another day!

If you're feeling overwhelmed, under-resourced, outflanked and out-gunned, remember that:

The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.

Romans 8 v 11

There is now a power at work within you that is more than a match for whoever and whatever decides to get in your face and try to back you down.

Man of God, you've been commissioned, empowered and unleashed to fight the good fight of faith.

It's time to grip your spear, grit your teeth and go for it!

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Romans 8 v 31

COMBAT TRAINING



Session 1:

Growing as a warrior of faith

I hope the exploits of JB have inspired you to be a faith-filled gospel soldier who fights and prevails against all odds. However, it would be dangerous to look to JB alone for our inspiration. There was another warrior whose against-all-odds victory should do far more to encourage our hearts, strengthen our resolve and increase our faith. His name is Jesus, and when Jesus sets His mind on something, nothing and no one can stand in His way!

Read Luke 9 v 51-56

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village." **Luke 9 v 51-56**

» *What was waiting for Jesus in Jerusalem?*

- » *What does it mean that Jesus “set his face” to go there?*
- » *Why was Jesus rejected by the Samaritan villagers?*
- » *Have you ever been rejected/belittled/opposed for following Jesus? In what way(s)?*
- » *As a disciple you are called to deny yourself, take up our cross and follow Jesus (Mark 8 v 34-36). In what way(s) can you follow the example of Jesus to set your face to fight and to prevail?*

Read Romans 8:

(it's big and chunky but totally worth it!)

After 30 verses of mind-blowing gospel truth, verse 31 asks a simple question: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

- » *What's your answer to that question?*
- » *Which of the epic truths and promises unpacked in this chapter get your blood pumping, your faith rising and your heart set on following Jesus, whatever the cost?*
- » *What are you going to do this week to set your face, overcome the odds and stand for Jesus?*