

STUDY GUIDE

FIVE SESSIONS

# I DECLARE WAR

4 KEYS TO WINNING



THE BATTLE WITH YOURSELF

LEVI LUSKO

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4 KEYS TO WINNING THE  
BATTLE WITH YOURSELF

STUDY GUIDE | 5 SESSIONS

**LEVI LUSKO**  
with Allen Arnold



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*I Declare War Study Guide*

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# INTRODUCTION

**I** *declare war.* What images does that phrase stir up in your mind? Maybe you picture armed troops moving into position on a battlefield. Or perhaps it brings up scenes of fighter jets flying into formation for a dogfight. Or you might envision leaders of nations announcing their intention to go to war against another power—much like Franklin D. Roosevelt did after the attack on Pearl Harbor, when he said to the American people:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. . . . Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces—with the unbounding determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God.<sup>1</sup>

Today, whether you realize it or not, you are also at war. Hostilities exist between you and your adversary. I have no doubt in my own life that the devil sends his demons to mess with me. But beyond this, I also know that I cause more than enough

problems to keep myself occupied. I am my biggest enemy, and I desperately want and need to get out of my own way.

I am guessing that you can relate. I imagine that you, like me, have encountered struggles with your *thoughts* . . . or with your *words* . . . or with your *actions*. Left unchecked, these struggles will break you down—day by day—and fill your life with pain and suffering.

I was recently reminded of this truth while watching a segment on a news program about the Millennium Tower in San Francisco. Constructed in the early 2000s at a cost of \$350 million, and standing at a height of 645 feet, its 58 stories boast every amenity possible to attract the tech moguls and venture capitalists of Silicon Valley. There is only one problem . . . and it is a major one: *the building is sinking*.

So far, it has sunk by seventeen inches, and it is tilting fourteen inches to the northwest. Slowly but surely, it is being swallowed up by the earth at the rate of one-and-a-half to two inches per year. The reason? Engineers failed to anchor the foundation in bedrock. The entire structure is built on concrete friction piles embedded eighty feet down into sand. But to get to the more secure layer of bedrock, workers would have had to have gone down to 200 feet.<sup>2</sup>

The moral of the story? If you want to go up high and withstand the stresses of this modern life, you need to build your foundation on something solid. This is exactly what Jesus said in one of his more famous parables:

These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but

nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards (Matthew 7:24–27 MSG).

To be fair, our lives often sway more than the Millennium Tower. We aren't confident in who we are, so we hide behind masks. We embrace wrong thoughts that lead to hurtful words, which then lead to actions we wish we could undo. We're wobbly from bad decisions. Worse, we're *sinking*. The answer to such a crisis isn't a new paint job. It's a new foundation.

Today, you need to get serious about your thoughts, words, and actions that are keeping you down. You need to name those behaviors and declare war against them if you want to overcome them. And just as in the card game War—which you probably played with your friends as a kid—your victory will be determined by laying down the right cards.

You have an enemy who wants to keep you locked into the same patterns of negative and destructive behaviors. There is no blinking at the fact that you, your territory, and your interests are in grave danger from his attacks. Your only recourse is to declare war against him and all that is holding you back—on all the darkness, the demons, the anxieties, the narcissism, the selfishness, and all your self-sabotaging ways.

It is time to rise up and fight for what matters most—winning the war within yourself.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The *I Declare War* video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. Each session begins with a brief welcome section and several opening questions to get you thinking about the topic. You will then watch a video with Levi Lusko and jump into some directed small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer as a group.

Each person in the group should have his or her own copy of this study guide. You are also encouraged to have a copy of the *I Declare War* book, as reading the book alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. See the “For Next Week” section at the end of each between-studies section for the chapters in the book that correspond to material you and your group are discussing.

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the teaching for the week, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their

lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only “go through the motions,” or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you’re looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a “safe place.” This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else’s opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to “fix” a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that’s not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, reflect on the material you’ve covered by engaging in any or all of the between-sessions activities. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half-hour a day on different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even start!) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are wanted and welcome at the group even if you don’t have your “homework” done.

Keep in mind the videos, discussion questions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply it to your life. As you go through this study, be watching for

what God is saying to you as it relates to declaring war against your thoughts, your words, and your actions . . . and how you can rely on your “secret weapon” in the battle.

**Note:** If you are a group leader, there are additional resources provided in the back of this guide to help you lead your group members through the study.





# IT'S TIME TO DECLARE WAR

*To be prepared for war is the most  
effectual means of preserving peace.*

GEORGE WASHINGTON

## WELCOME

My guess is that you are facing a situation right now for which you don't have the answers. Something that is making you feel terrified, trapped, or lonely. You feel as if you are a victim of your circumstances . . . and you don't know where to turn for help.

Perhaps it's a cycle of retaliation with your spouse that is leading to a vicious silence that no one is willing to break. You know that if something doesn't change, your marriage isn't going to last. Or maybe you're ready to quit your job because it seems your coworkers are all against you. Or it could be a struggle with your temper. You haven't crossed the line yet, but you've come close. Or the problem might be a crippling anxiety that you just can't seem to shake. You feel as if your life is spinning out of control.

The worst thing about feeling *victimized* in this way is that it's impossible to be a *victim* and a *victor* at the same time. It's time for something better in your life. In fact, as we will discuss throughout this study, *God* wants something much better for you. He wants to lead you and guide you through the problems you are facing. But the first step in this journey requires a conscious action on your part. *You have to admit the conflict is real.*

As any soldier will tell you, you can't win a war if you are unwilling to admit a conflict exists in the first place. This is why making your declaration is so important. *I declare war . . . against the cycle of retaliation . . . against my bad behaviors . . . against anxiety and depression . . . against the darkness and my self-sabotaging tendencies.*

When you declare war in this way, you are refusing to go gently into the night or to be taken without a fight. You are

waging war on the version of yourself that you don't want to be. And, as you will find, there is freedom and power in making such a declaration.

## SHARE

*If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, discuss one of the following questions:*

- ♣ How many people in the group have played the card game War? How does one win or lose the game? How might that apply to this study?

—or—

- ♣ Why did you choose to be a part of this study? What are you hoping to learn from this experience?

## READ

*Invite someone to read aloud the following passage. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.*

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

JOHN 10:9–10 NKJV

- ♣ What is one key insight that stands out to you in this passage?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ♣ What desire does Jesus have for your life? What desire does the enemy have for you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ♣ What promise does Jesus make to you? What is required on your part?

## WATCH

*Play the video for session one. As you and your group watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or key points that stand out to you.*

## NOTES

All of us have a war we are fighting, and it's a war we're facing within. We are in a battle involving the thoughts we think, the words we speak, and the actions we take.

The Bible makes it clear that both God and the enemy have an agenda for our lives. Jesus wants us to experience life to the full, but the devil seeks only to steal, kill, and destroy.

Every choice we make is a door we're deciding to walk through. And we have to choose carefully, because some doors lead to life and others lead to death.

We have to discover how to stop creating problems for ourselves—to get out of our own way. It starts with us making this statement: “I declare war on my tendency to sabotage myself.”

In the words of President Teddy Roosevelt, when we choose to *fight* the battle rather than simply *talk* or *think* about it, a “wolf rises up in our heart.” Once we commit ourselves to the conflict, a new courage and resolve surfaces within us.

The first three “cards” in our declaration of war involve our words, our thoughts, and our actions. The fourth represents the all-important power of the Holy Spirit.

The fourth card is critical, because we cannot win this war in our own strength. We need God to give us power, tell us who we are, and supercharge all our efforts.

## DISCUSS

*Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts together.*

1. We often think of a battle as something going on around us, yet the most important war we face is the one within us. How does this struggle tend to play out in our lives?
  
2. Read aloud **2 Corinthians 2:9–11**. What strategies does Paul put forward in this passage on how to outwit the enemy?



# PRAY

*Wrap up your time together with prayer—simply taking a few minutes to talk with God. Here are a few ideas of what you could pray about based on what you discussed in this session:*

- ◆ Ask God to bring clarity to the specific areas he wants to transform in your lives.
- ◆ Pray for God to strengthen you as you rise up against what’s been holding you back.
- ◆ Declare that the way things *have been* are not the way things *will be* going forward.
- ◆ Ask for greater understanding on how your words, your thoughts, and your actions have been leading to life—or destruction—for you and those around you.
- ◆ Declare war on your tendency to sabotage yourself.

# RESPOND

This week, set aside some time to evaluate what you discussed with your group in this session and how you’ll apply it to your life. A good place to start is to identify your primary struggles. Write them down below. Declare war on them. Remember . . . this isn’t just about making a list so you can just think about or talk about the struggles. Naming your struggles is a concrete way of declaring war on the version of yourself that you don’t want to be.

- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_

## SESSION 1

# BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

Reflect on the material you've covered this week by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. Each day offers a short reading from *I Declare War*, along with a few reflection questions to take you deeper into the theme of this week's study. Journal or jot down your thoughts after each question. At the start of the next session, you will have a few minutes to share any insights you learned . . . but remember, the primary goal of these questions is for your own personal growth and your own private reflection.

### DAY ONE:

## A MAZE WITH NO EXITS

There is nothing I can do to stop it.

My stomach flutters, and my skin is glistening with sweat. Thinking about all the different ways I could possibly

die by my own hands, I lurch from sleep with a sickening quickness, like an unbuckled crash test dummy in a simulated collision. My mind races, and my eyes burn. The voice in my head telling me I am going to kill myself sounds like me, but it is not on my side. Helplessly I watch myself moving toward a path of self-harm—and I have no emergency brake to pull. Panicking, disoriented, and scared, I stumble out of bed and pace the hall, trying to figure out where I am and why I am so afraid.

Under my breath, I mumble a trusted Bible verse from my arsenal over and over . . . weapons I keep in my war chest for specific situations just like this. Eventually I'm able to bring down my mind's RPM from a scream to a dull roar. The fear that hung in the air like a thick, acrid smoke soon dissipates, and I start to feel like things will be all right. I peel off my T-shirt and towel off my damp skin before crawling back into bed.

Variations of this 2:00 a.m. ritual have played out as far back as I can remember. . . . The Bible calls these fits "terror by night" (Psalm 91:5 NKJV), and in the moment it feels like being locked in a maze with no exits. I don't always have suicidal thoughts; sometimes I fear harm happening to my children or making a mistake with enormous, terrible implications. For many years my fear took the form of a sense of pressure and urgency, as though I were forced to figure out a puzzle underwater, in the dark, in a language I didn't speak, with the weight of the world bearing down on me and a thousand loved ones' lives depending on my ability to do what I knew I couldn't.



## DAY TWO: WHEN FEAR STRIKES

My night terrors haven't gone away, but I have learned how to manage them better. They seem to ramp up when something big is about to happen, like when I'm facing a major opportunity or when our church is about to expand.

Unfortunately, nighttime isn't the only time my mind locks up with fear; daytime can be just as scary. Anxious thoughts, fears, worries, and the regrets that come when walking away from a conversation you wish you could do over—all can be just as difficult.

Sometimes I watch myself shifting slowly into a funk that I know will lead to unhappiness. I become like Bruce Willis in *The Sixth Sense*. I try to avoid this well-worn path that leads to nowhere. I plead with myself, *Turn around! Quit pouting. This is not the way to get what you want. Use your words and stop sulking!* But I don't seem to heed the warning, no matter how much I wave my arms and raise my voice.

This is not even to mention the addictive way I mindlessly turn to social media, online shopping, and other digital distractions when I am feeling sad, lonely, unappreciated, or bored, or when I am just avoiding working on something great. Oh, yeah—I also look to food to give me comfort when I am down. Carbs are my go-to agent for a quick hit of happiness when I am blue. The empty calories never seem to fill the emptiness in me that I am trying to shove them into, and I know I will feel worse in half an hour, but that doesn't stop me from shoveling chips into my mouth by the handful.



DAY THREE:  
**THE WOLF WILL RISE**

When you decide you're done playing the blame game and you're ready to become a victor, you will find that a wolf rises in your heart. That is how Theodore Roosevelt, the youngest person to hold the office of president, described the "power of joy in battle" that floods a person who chooses to meet the challenge spread out before him.<sup>3</sup> This larger-than-life president, who is literally chiseled in stone on Mount Rushmore (and is permanently one and the same with Robin Williams because of *Night at the Museum*, at least in my mind), led the Rough Riders on horseback into the battle for San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War. Mauser machine gun bullets sprayed out from the top of the mountain, cutting down man after man, yet Teddy fought on, relentlessly urging his men forward.

In that terrible situation he crossed a barbed wire fence that lay on the battlefield and fully committed to the action before him—and at that moment a wolf rose in his heart. . . . Teddy had flipped a switch inside, and he was unstoppable in his resolve to do what was necessary. A witness said that from the instant he stepped across the wire he "became the most magnificent soldier I have ever seen."<sup>4</sup> A shell exploded near him, burning his skin, yet he pressed on. A stray bullet nicked his elbow, but he didn't notice. He didn't stop until the battle was won. For the rest of his life, he referred to that day, July 1, 1898, as the greatest day of his life. . . .

There is incredible power in setting all that is within you in a singular direction.



## DAY FOUR: GOING ON THE OFFENSIVE

So much of the time, we react defensively to what comes our way. Stop letting life happen to you, and start happening to your life. Meet the enemy on your terms. Go on the offensive. Whether you are a sophomore in college or are in your sixties and contemplating life after retirement, when you decide to stare the things in the face that are holding you back, a strength will bubble up inside your chest. As twentieth-century Scottish explorer W. H. Murray wrote, “The moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too . . . raising in one’s favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.”<sup>5</sup>

Declare war, and the wolf will rise. Don’t overthink it—you have time to work through all the implications. And you’re not going to have to fight alone; you have an enormous amount of backup and firepower at your disposal. . . . Each session, or “card,” in this study deals with a vital component of your internal struggles. And each card builds toward the most vital card—the fourth one.

It’s essential you make it to the end. As good as the first three cards are, they won’t matter without the all-important fourth card.

I’ve lived the principles I’m going to share with you. They’re at play in my life right now. . . . Every manner of distraction, depression, and gloom has filled my mind the past few months. But I finally crossed the barbed wire because I know you need these concepts as much as I do.



# DAY FIVE: MAKE YOUR DECLARATION

Before we move on to the next session, it's time for you to write your specific Declaration of War in the space provided below.

Start by writing these four words: I declare war on \_\_\_\_\_ . Next, underneath that phrase, list what you are declaring war against. Be specific. For example, "I declare war against the darkness I feel in my life." Or, "I declare war on the demons that come to mess with me when I am feeling vulnerable." Or, "I declare war on anxiety and depression and my self-sabotaging tendencies."

Don't sanitize your list. The time for half measures is over. To be clean, you must come clean. Remember, you are not entering into this battle in your own strength. So, under your declaration, describe how you are trusting God for the victory and leaning fully into his strength. Claim his protection and resolve to put on his armor (see Ephesians 6:10-20).

This doesn't have to be perfect. But you do need to be clear what you are declaring war against. Like Theodore Roosevelt, once you flip the switch inside, you too can be unstoppable in your resolve to do what is necessary. It is time for the wolf to rise up!

I DECLARE WAR ON

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This is what I am specifically declaring war against . . .

This is how I am trusting God for the victory and relying on his strength . . .

This is how I am claiming his protection and putting on his armor . . .

## FOR NEXT WEEK

Use the space below to write any key insights or questions from your personal study that you want to discuss at the next group meeting. In preparation for next week, review Card 1 (chapters 1–4) in *I Declare War*.

