

## Warfare and Women: The Next Step

Recently, a young businessman with a thriving men's ministry in his city, called me frustrated by what I believe marks the growing edge of God's move among men. "Our leaders have been going through your books and material now for months and it's been great," he told me. "We've gotten real with each other, talked about everything from jobs to sex, learned to see God as our Father, and seen major healing and deliverance together. I don't think any of us has ever known brotherhood and fellowship like we've got here now."

He sighed audibly. "The more secure we get with each other and the Father, the more we sense it's time for us to move out in spiritual warfare. But we're realizing we can't go there without our wives on board. In fact, we really don't want to. We want to be battle partners together. The women see that we're getting healed, and they want that for us. But at the same time, they're getting angry, feeling left out. We men are getting stronger, and they seem afraid of our strength and don't trust us to use it right. We don't want to misuse it, but we sure don't want to bury it and retreat.

"As men, we're not sure what to do," he confessed. "But we were wondering if maybe your wife Mary could come out here with you and meet with the women while you meet with us guys, and see if we can work this through together somehow."

The timing was perfect, as our son would be leaving the country on a mission trip shortly. I went online to book our flight for the morning after his--and immediately the battle was on. When I clicked the "Purchase" price, the airlines site page suddenly went down and then came back up—at \$300 per ticket more. Four hours of hassling on the phone finally restored the original price. A few days later, the host forwarded us an email from several women saying they would not come to "another event telling us to submit to our husbands." Mary replied, affirming that she liked these women already! In fact, she would tell us all to submit to one another (Ephes. 5:21), and help the women trust and respect their husbands as partners by discovering their identity and strength as daughters of the Father.

The morning before our flight, we put our son on a bus to Los Angeles airport with his mission youth group and rushed to get ready for our trip the next morning. That afternoon, shortly before his international flight, he called and said the airlines wouldn't let him on the plane because his passport—inadvertently washed with his jeans--was separated just slightly at the cover. Desperately, I raced to the Passport window at the Post Office, where the clerk, a friend and Christian, said it all: "There's nothing we can do but pray."

As we prayed there in the Post Office passport room, my son called my cell phone again to say the airlines had agreed to fly him there, but they would have to fly him back to LA immediately if the security officials on the other end wouldn't accept his passport. I called to pray with Mary, then dashed home and emailed our conference host back East. "You want spiritual warfare?" I wrote. "We got it. Call the men there and pray to release our family."

Warfare, indeed. At the airport the next morning for our own flight, the check-in agent typed in our tickets, then frowned in confusion. "You have reservations, but we don't have seats for you." Exasperated, I urged him to keep trying, and he returned to his keyboard while Mary and I stood praying fiercely. Five minutes before the flight, he tossed us two tickets: "Run over to the gate and see if you can get on." We rushed over. "I'm sorry," the gate agent said, "but we only have one seat. You'll have to split up." I refused, and insisted on our two seats. I knew this trip was about reconciling men and women, and recognized the Enemy's scheme to separate Mary and me at the outset. Again we prayed. A minute later, we were inexplicably cleared and ran out across the tarmac to take our seats.

After we landed at our destination that night, my suitcase and books didn't arrive for two days. When we began ministry Friday evening, we didn't know whether our son had entered his mission country, or had been sent back to LA.

Meanwhile, Mary met with 15 wives at the host's home, while I met with the men—from several local churches—at the men's ministry center they had together leased and built out, complete with rooms for weightlifting, computer terminals, counseling sessions, cooking, and larger meetings.

"The women came in guarded and resistant," Mary said. "They were carrying so much emotion—I just encouraged them to share their fears and concerns for two hours before saying anything at all." I spoke to the men about how to battle for, and not against, a woman, from the chapter "The Woman as Ally" in my book *Fight like a Man*. By 10 pm we had finished. I called Mary, who had even then only just begun to teach, and told her to ask the women if they were ready to meet with the men the next morning.

"NO!" a chorus of shouts rose up in the background.

Clearly, the women were finding their voice before men and bonding together as women. "Tell the men we need a little more time," Mary advised gingerly. Back at the Men's Center, a smile—tentative but understanding—broke out across the room.

The next morning, Mary talked to the women about grounding their identity in Christ and how childhood wounds from Mom and Dad can sabotage intimacy with a man. She then led them in forgiveness and healing prayers. I talked to the men about overcoming our fear of women, and its roots in the mother-wound. By noon, the women agreed to come together with the men and we gathered for lunch at the men's center. Mary and I were awed by God's grace as couples embraced warmly.

That afternoon, as husbands and wives sat arm-in-arm before us, Mary and I took turns teaching more specifically on spiritual warfare, and lessons we've learned as a couple in keeping the Enemy from drawing us apart. We closed praying over the group, and broke several major strongholds, including "independence" and "division," that had been attacking the marriages there.

"Neither man nor woman can go it alone or claim priority," I read from 1 Corinth. 11:11-12 (*The Message*). "Man was created first, as a beautiful shining reflection of God—that is true. But the head on a woman's body clearly outshines in beauty the head of her 'head,' her husband. The first woman came from a man, true—but ever since then, every man comes from a woman! And since virtually everything comes from God anyway, let's quit going through these 'who's first' routines."

Later that night, as we stepped at last into our room, Mary suddenly fell to the bed with an "awful headache." We battled this Enemy backlash in prayer for an hour until she was able to sleep. Thankfully, she awoke refreshed. Before the next afternoon's session, we learned at last that our son had passed through customs OK and was enjoying his mission work. "Haleluia!" the men and women shouted.

When we arrived home in Santa Barbara, again our luggage was lost. After two frustrating days of fruitless hassle, I finally gave up and just asked my Father to find it. That afternoon, an airlines agent called. "We have your bags here in Yuma anytime you want to come and pick them up."

"Yuma, as in Arizona'?" I exclaimed. As more anger stirred within me, the sheer buffoonery of it all overwhelmed me with a laugh—and humble repentance. For at last, I knew. With all these frustrations, the Enemy had been stealing our energies and distracting us from what God was doing. Politely asking the agent to return our bags to Santa Barbara, I hung up and fell on my knees.

The flak is thickest when you're over the target. The intensity of the resistance, that is, often measures the significance of God's Call. Our fierce battle that weekend points to a much larger contest, one basic, in fact, to human origins and divine destiny. How can we reconcile races, nations, or any other human differences if we can't reconcile the most primary—indeed, the very Genesis--of human

differences, in man and woman? In fact, could God's effort to reconcile us to Himself in Jesus be rooted in the separation of Eve from Adam and the fig leaves that followed?

Today's Call is for men and women to fight together—not against each other, but side by side.

Deliberately, responsibly, we begin apart.

Faithfully, victoriously, we rise together.