

Declaring a Ceasefire From Toxic Female Relationships

Many of us suffer significant emotional pain as a result of how other women have treated us. And if we're honest, we've been rather nasty ourselves on occasion. We've reacted out of our own vulnerable places, lashing out at one another. What we end up with is a general lack of trust of other women—even those we should be closest to: mothers, sisters, girlfriends and so forth.

As I see it, there are two primary reasons women war against one another. First, Satan hates us. Because there is continual war between the enemy and us, he constantly sets in motion opportunities for us to doubt the heart of another toward us. If we don't know the truth about who we are and what we are called to, we will fall victim to his plots.

Second, we've consistently wounded one another. Sometimes in the heat of the battle, you can become confused about who's the enemy and who's your ally. Thinking you are defending your own territory and righteously assaulting what is evil, you strike out at those who are on your team. We know there is a war, but we have been misled about who our enemy really is.

When She Swings a Painful Sword

My friend Amy had an experience with a woman who had been wounded by the battle for femininity. She was on a bus headed to a retreat, and felt a little nervous.

As the trip got underway, she tapped the shoulder of a beautiful woman near her and asked, "When's lunch?" The woman snapped back with a rude response.

On the surface, this young woman looked as though she had it all together. But as the weekend progressed, she shared her

story. Amy discovered she had gone through more heartache in the past few years than anyone should experience in a lifetime. By the end of the retreat, they had overcome their rough start and had begun to form a friendship. When you encounter someone who swings a painful sword your way or gives off a vibe of meanness, look past the surface and realize something is going on in her heart.

Many of us are trapped in the after-effects of war. We've experienced such horrific wounds and seen such massive damage in relationships that we suffer from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder.

4 Consequences of Unhealed Wounds

We can easily be set off by situations that are similar to our past battlefield experiences. We may recover from our outer wounds, but the damage done in our souls continues to haunt us. If our wounds remain unhealed, we will experience a progression of pain that will leave us with an inability to receive and give love. Here is how I see this progression of pain happening for women:

1. We experience a form of emotional deadness (barrenness). We lose our ability to nurture others, sometimes even our own children, because we have not been nurtured ourselves. Our pain is so intense we lose our long-term perspective. We focus only on what we can do to alleviate our suffering. The problem is that if we refuse to feel pain, we will also be unable to feel joy.

2. If our wounds remain unhealed, insecurity grows. We see ourselves, and others, from an improper perspective. Lacking love, we become rude, fearful and prone to slander. Since we don't want to be rejected, we isolate ourselves from the perceived threat: other women. We become autonomous and independent, thinking we don't need anyone.

3. Our inherent ability to nurture becomes misdirected. Since

we think we can depend only on ourselves, opening up to another person for help or love, especially a woman, seems frightening and risky. This kind of vulnerability is contrary to the coping tools we've developed. In an attempt to fill the void in our hearts, we smother our children and mother our men.

4. We form a long string of broken relationships. We lack the emotional health and relational skills to overcome the bumps. It seems easier to quit and move on than to restore damaged relationships. Some simply shut down all emotion, becoming robotic and flat, finding themselves unable to intimately connect with others.

To overcome this pattern of pain, you and I have to lay down our carnal weapons of fear, self-defense and hatred, and pick up some righteous weapons that are effective for overcoming the lies and wounds of our true enemy. The Bible says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

If you've been deeply hurt by another woman, you may find it difficult to imagine how you could ever move beyond the pain of your past. Rather than rejecting other women, why not use your righteous weapons (which have immense power) against the real enemy and watch God demolish the strongholds of your hurt?

Steps to a Full Recovery

Begin by getting involved in a local, life-giving body of believers where you can receive truth, encouragement, comfort and safety. Ask God to nurture you. Let Him mentor you. With this support system in place, you can start on your road to

recovery by following these steps:

Step 1: Recognize you've been fighting against your own sisters. Don't let your pain keep you from being honest about where you have been violated, ignored, betrayed or wounded by women. Just because you may not want to fight doesn't mean you haven't been engaged in the war. Make a list of your offenders and pray over it.

Step 2: Identify the lies. Recognize the irrational or unhealthy patterns of thinking that have resulted from your painful experiences, including the lies that may have opened the door for this type of wound in the first place. When you can identify the propaganda, labels and lies, you are ready to move forward.

Step 3: Identify the truth. We possess several weapons to help us in this war, but truth is one of the most important and most powerful. Plunder God's Word for His opinions, His purposes and His promises. Surround yourself with Scriptures about who you are and what God says about you. Saturate yourself in prayer, praise and worship. Ask Him to speak the truth to you, and then listen for His answer.

Step 4: Let the truth change what you believe. Be patient with yourself. Truth is like a seed. You have to nurture it, take care of it and wait for it to produce fruit. Eventually what you believe will help you form new ways of thinking, feeling and responding. Take note of the changes you see in your heart. And don't be discouraged in your season of restoration. Soon you will see the results.

Step 5: Gather your courage and do something different. Break off unhealthy relationships and begin to repair potentially positive relationships. Establish healthy boundaries that help you determine in advance what you will and won't put up with. Develop some preplanned responses to mean-spirited jabs you may receive in the future so you are prepared to be different.

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Jan Greenwood *revolutionizes women's friendships with each other in* Women at War: Declaring a Cease-Fire on Toxic Female Relationships (Charisma House). *Find this resource on , or anywhere Christian books are sold.*