

Use This Life-Changing Strategy Against Satan's Assault on Marriage

"What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

I'm relaxing next to a warm, simmering fire in a beautiful lodge in Branson, Missouri, after a week-long, life-changing marriage intensive. Focus on the Family has landed on something powerful in the Ozark Mountains. This retreat center is special, and it is uniquely designed to protect husbands and wives from very strategic and vicious attacks of the enemy on their marriage. Our last counseling session ended just a few hours ago, and I can honestly say this is a week that will impact me forever. My wife's testimony is the same. We have been transformed.

The coming revival and worldwide revolution in the church will test every soldier of the Lord. The pressure will be extreme, and the battle demands a healed and whole army. I am convinced the quickest way to eliminate men and women of God who are critical in this end-time mission is to rip apart marriages. There is little else that can demoralize and destroy those who have a calling of God on their lives more quickly and completely than strife and disunity within the construct of God's holy union of marriage. A person may have a powerful vision, an earth-shaking anointing and a hunger for God to move mightily—and get derailed by darkness brooding within their own homes.

Instead of being vibrant, full of life, keenly focused, on the alert and ready to impact the world, God's soldiers can find themselves weary, battered and struggling to raise the shield of faith, even in their own living rooms, as the fiery darts

fly. If the war zone is taking place in the home, the world will have to wait, and the enemy knows that.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25).

Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church. I doubt we understand the depth of that statement. If we are called as warriors, and as the beautiful bride of Christ, it's imperative that we understand how to love within the bounds of marriage. We must become captivated by the immeasurable depths of God's love for us, His Bride. I'm provoked by God's unhindered ability to love us without the restrictions that woundedness brings.

No matter how unfaithful we are, or how out of touch and selfish we may be, it does not hinder God's passion for us in the least. His heart burns for us. His emotions are deep. Stop and think about that for a moment. Consider the difficulty of comprehensively, passionately and fully loving your spouse. Imagine what it would be like if hurtful words, insensitivity, disconnectedness or unfaithfulness had absolutely no impact on your love for them. How would your life be different? Oh, my! Everything would be different. Imagine the abounding freedom and joy that would be ours.

Further, what would it be like on the other side? What if your weakness, struggles, sins, hurtful actions, selfishness and abuse did nothing to affect your spouse's love for you? Such an experience would almost be disorienting. It's beyond the scope of what is normal, what is reasonable. I am leaping inside even as I write this. A life of unconditional love is something beyond all of our realm of experience. Oh, how I long for this!

Of course, I'm not suggesting that our negative actions wouldn't be hurtful, or that our spouse's sins wouldn't wound us. We are human, and woundedness is real. It means we are

still alive and sensitive. However, I can imagine a God-ordained marriage that was so pure that, while hurt would still come, love would be constant and overwhelming. I pray this provokes you to believe for a marriage that is abounding in love.

I believe it will take a warrior bride who is healthy and driven by love to advance into the darkness in the coming end-time battle. We all must be healed, healthy, dead to self and full of love.

Let all that you do be done with love (1 Cor. 16:14).

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. Whoever fears is not perfect in love (1 John 4:18).

If we are truly honest, we'd see the root of most of our conflicts in marriage is founded in fear. Fear of losing control. Fear of being manipulated. Fear of unfaithfulness. Fear of mistreatment. Fear that we will not be loved. I could go on and on. Fear is so pervasive in life, and it most certainly is in marriage.

Imagine what would change if all of that fear were eliminated. No more fear of rejection. No fear of abuse. No fear of anything. Our marriages would break free from chains that are devastating and restricting and debilitating. A life free from fear can only come as we are awakened to the love of God in a very real, legitimate way—and when we allow God's transforming love to be exhibited through us. Our freedom comes not when others stop threatening us, but rather when their threats, assaults, cruelty and hatred have no power over us. Our freedom comes not when they finally love us, but when we can finally love them.

The intensive we enjoyed this week gave language to this and

supplied tools that we simply could not have discovered without spending a secluded week in this very special place. Yes, there are books with the material we could study, but there's something about people ministering to people, day after day, in a very raw environment, that can bring freedom and breakthrough so deeply.

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its fires of desire are as ardent flames, a most intense flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly condemned (Song 8:6-7).

Love like this will eradicate fear. Marriages that experience a revelation of this love will be something to behold. My passion is to live in that love with my beautiful bride, Amy.

Enough with the excuses. Men, quit balking. Women, pay the price. A week at a marriage intensive will absolutely change your life.

I wish I could share the stories of the couples who were radically, remarkably transformed this week. Our small group of five couples spent hours together allowing God to hit us in deep, vulnerable places—as everybody else watched, and quite often, cried along with us. We all had different stories and reasons for attending, and we all were transformed. Every single one of us.

My wife and I live such an amazing, fun-filled life. Our marriage truly is filled with joy, and we are the very best of friends. We love building business together, traveling together, relaxing together, ministering together, raising our kids together and dreaming together. We also admit that our crazy life and our complimentary yet different personalities, emotional needs and desires can create havoc. It is very easy for selfishness to creep in. It can become difficult to

understand each other's perspective. Battles can start to erupt and the joy and life can slowly fade. Frustration sets in, hearts can start to get a little hard and the enemy can certainly find a foothold in our marriage. Presuming all is well is ridiculous. Hoping it will naturally get better is foolish. Intervention is needed.

Is it possible to resolve things on your own in similar situations? Possibly. Yet, I want to provoke you to curiosity. I'm telling you that an intensive like the one Amy and I just participated in will result in freedom at depths you could never discover without professional, godly help.

For those who would argue that Christian counseling or intensives like the one I'm describing are unnecessary for Spirit-filled Christians, I'd say you are flat-out wrong. Many argue that deliverance and prayer are all that is necessary. Sometimes that is true. Most often it is not. We need each other, and we need the wonderful wisdom that organizations like Focus on the Family can offer. I'll tell you this: I absolutely never could have achieved the level of freedom and healing of my heart without the tools and impartation we received. I am so thankful for the absolutely wonderful and brilliant counselors that worked with us.

Understand, my wife and I came here because of some tension, stress and some typical married-life struggles. It would have been extremely easy for me to reject the notion that such an intensive would be necessary. In fact, I'm like many others, men especially, by shrinking back at the suggestion of counseling. The natural response from me could have been, "Nah, we really don't need counseling. We are OK! All is well. We love each other. We can work on the minor tweaks together. Maybe we can work through a marriage devotional. That's all we need!"

That would have been the most unfortunate response. I would have missed out on some glorious, abundant marriage life.

Yes, there were tears this week. Yes, there were ups and downs. Yes, it was hard to be vulnerable, uncovered and on the hot seat.

But I thank God for the tears, for the journey through the ups and downs. I'm thankful for the literal miracles I witnessed in other wonderful couples. I'm so alive because of the vulnerability of both my wife and myself. The love, understanding and unmerited affection I both received and gave is something I'll never be able to explain.

Of course, the tools we received and the revelation we experienced demand that we continue to stay tuned into each other. I'm actually excited about continuing some deep "heart talks" and applying principles that help us make decisions together, without strife, and while genuinely valuing Amy's perspective—even if it differs from mine. I'm looking forward to ministering to her heart instead of focusing on her arguments. I'm also looking forward for her to see me in a different way, understanding my heart and loving me through our discussions.

So, yes, save your money, humble yourself, don't underestimate the determination of the enemy to destroy your marriage, get excited about the wonders that only God can reveal in a holy, love-filled marriage and reserve a marriage intensive at Focus on the Family or another amazing, Christian counseling center.

It will be the best week of your life. It could be the most important week of your life. This intensive is designed for couples in crisis—most any type of crisis. For more information, visit www.focusonthefamily.com. They have retreat centers in Branson, Missouri; Rome, Georgia; and Greenville, Michigan. The accommodations we enjoyed in Branson were rustic and luxurious. The food and hospitality were phenomenal. The memories are priceless.

I'm not being paid for my recommendation by Focus on the

Family. Well, I take that back. I've been paid with something immensely valuable—a newfound love in what was an already amazing marriage. I am thankful.