

There's a Warrior In You

Why are so many Christian men today defeated by sin? It's because they've never enlisted for spiritual battle.

Like so many typical churchgoing guys, Ben admits that he struggles in his relationship with God. He tries to maintain a consistent prayer life, but too often he sleeps through his alarm and ends up having morning devotions during his harried commute to work. He made Bible study a goal, but he keeps falling asleep while reading the Word because he feels so tired after a hard day at the office.

Then there's that nagging lust problem. Ben once confessed to a friend at church that he peeks at online pornography. What he didn't admit was that he regularly entertains sexual fantasies—and that these impure thoughts trigger continual guilt. As a result of his shame, he withholds feelings from his wife—which is causing an uneasy coldness in his marriage.

Sound familiar? If Ben's predicament isn't your own, I'm sure you know some guys who have a similar problem. As I have spoken in various churches throughout the United States during the last two years, I've met hundreds of Bens—guys who want to please God but who feel they've sunk too deep in their own failures to reclaim their lost spirituality.

Many men live their Christian lives in the proverbial hamster's cage, running on a wheel and going nowhere. They're convinced that God must be ready to give up on them if He hasn't already. Because they view God in this distorted way, they back away from His mercy rather than pursuing it.

As a result, a huge percentage of God's men are spiritually debilitated. They've disqualified themselves. The shame that hangs around their necks gets heavier by the day, so that they

eventually become immobilized. And that's just where the devil wants them.

In recent years, some strong voices have been calling out to the American Christian male—beckoning him to come out of his defeated condition.

Promise Keepers challenged men to crawl out of the pit of failure by renewing their spiritual commitments and by acknowledging their need for moral accountability. More recently, in 2001, author John Eldredge challenged us to reclaim our latent masculinity by learning how to be Wild at Heart. Additionally, Stephen Arterburn challenged Christian men to wrestle their sexual addictions by facing what he aptly calls Every Man's Battle.

I agree with Promise Keepers, Eldredge and Arterburn that American Christian men must climb out of this pit and get ruthless with sin. But I also know that many men who stood at a Promise Keepers altar and vowed to walk in faithfulness to God are now struggling again. A guy can try to become "wild at heart," but it doesn't guarantee that his recharged masculinity will translate into measurable spiritual victory.

Frankly, I think it's odd that we as Christian men go hunting in Colorado or fishing for trout in Vermont in order to reclaim our lost sense of masculine adventure. And as much as I support efforts to get men free from lust, I don't think the battle can be won simply by talking about the problem and counting how many times you masturbated or had a lustful thought in the last week.

We're missing something: Jesus already commissioned us to the greatest adventure and the greatest battle of all time. He called us to reach all nations with the gospel. He called us to share Christ. He called us to claim spiritual territory for Him. That is "every man's battle!" It is by enlisting in that battle—and by determining that we will be used by God in the

lives of others—that we break the cycle of defeat.

The challenge of ministering to a lost world should be enough to make us wild at heart. After you've led someone to the Lord or helped a guy overcome a life-controlling problem or seen your life impact people from another nation, you simply won't have time to fool with your puny little problems.

The Call to War

I was 18 years old when I gave my life to Christ and asked Jesus to fill me with the Holy Spirit. A few days later I experienced what I realize now was a supernatural vision. At the time, I thought I was just seeing some vivid Technicolor thoughts.

In this vision I was riding on a horse, and Jesus was riding on His steed in front of me. Both of us were dressed in primitive armor, complete with swords, shields and bronze helmets. We were crisscrossing what looked like an ancient battlefield, and I had the sense that I was serving Jesus as an apprentice warrior.

When we arrived at our camp, Jesus unfolded a leather map and began to point at various places as He explained tomorrow's battle strategy. I remember thinking at the time: This is so awesome. I get to actually be with Jesus in the battle. Being near to Him was the most thrilling part of the whole vision.

It would be several years before I would read any books about spiritual warfare or come to understand that Christians have been given authority in the cosmic conflict with hell's forces. Yet, this vision marked my life immediately. I knew from that moment on that I had been called by God to engage in this war and that Jesus would lead me every step of the way.

My first spiritual battles were fought in college, when I was part of a campus ministry that was aggressively winning students to the Lord. I learned in those days that there is

nothing more exciting than seeing someone give his or her heart to Christ. Later, after I began a career in journalism, I tried to stay active in lay ministry, whether it was leading a home group in my church, discipling younger Christian guys or simply sharing my faith with people who don't know God.

In more recent years, the Lord challenged me to step outside of my comfort zone, and begin to speak in churches and at conferences. At first I tried to employ any imaginable excuse for why I shouldn't obey the call. (Lord, I'm not the right guy for this assignment. You know I can't preach good enough. You know I shouldn't travel away from my family. Yadda, yadda, yadda.)

In the end, I surrendered and have been doing lots of weekend ministry trips. I swallowed my fears and ripped up my excuses. Today, the thrill of seeing people's lives changed is so much of a rush that it sometimes keeps me up at night.

Recently, my travels have taken me to China, Nigeria, Europe and Latin America. God has opened doors for me to speak to underground Chinese evangelists, abused Guatemalan women and a group of 8,000 African pastors. And the more I step out into the unknown and allow God to use me, the more passionate I become about the Great Commission. Next year I'm hoping the Lord will send me to minister to people in closed Middle Eastern nations.

I can't get enough of the adventure. While I used to say, Not me, Lord. Now I say, Here I am, Lord, send me!

We must adopt this kind of ministry mind-set in order to walk in victory. Although I am plagued with a lot of insecurities, I had to learn to see myself as a warrior—as someone God could use to “tread on serpents and scorpions” (see Luke 10:19). And I've learned that when I see myself this way, I am catapulted into a new realm of victory over sin.

That doesn't mean I don't stumble anymore. I have wrestled

with lust, and I have confessed my failures to trusted friends. Godly accountability is essential for personal holiness.

But I've learned that all the accountability in the world will not work for you if you have not taken on a ministry mind-set. You can't win the battle with sin while sitting on the sidelines. It's only when you're in the trenches that you will see a breakthrough in your personal life.

In recent years, I have gleaned deep inspiration from some men in the Bible who were godly warriors. These guys excite me because I know their lives were designed by God to be models for us.

1. A timid man made valiant. Joshua was most likely a timid guy because God often challenged him to be "'strong and courageous'" (see Josh. 1:6,7,9). Yet, after he had an encounter with "the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord" (see 5:13-15), Joshua led God's people through endless battles. In fact, he never stopped fighting, even in his old age.

Joshua reminds me that I cannot fight in my own strength. But if I listen to the Lord, and stay close to His heart, I will be able to evict devils from their hide-outs and claim territory for Christ's kingdom. If you don't have a warrior mentality, perhaps it is because you have not yet seen Jesus as your Mighty Captain.

2. An insecure man who became a commander. Gideon had a serious inferiority complex. When the angel came to him and said, "'Hail, mighty warrior!'" (see Judg. 6:12), his response was basically, "Who, me?" He was the last guy any of us would have picked for a winning team.

But after Gideon encountered the fire of God, he was transformed into another man. He stormed into his father's house, tore down the idolatrous image of Baal and then stood up to his relatives who threatened to kill him. Then he led a

band of 300 scraggly men to overthrow the enemies of Israel. God can turn wimps into warriors!

3. The passionate giant-killer. David's life is full of lessons for us as men. His valor in the face of Goliath reminds us that we, too, are called to attack demonic giants—even when other Christians seem intimidated by the prospect of conflict. David's life gives me courage in the face of Islam, Mormonism, witchcraft or any other spiritual force that keeps people from knowing the truth of the gospel.

David's failures also provide some important insights. The reason David fell into adultery with Bathsheba was because he had left the battlefield and was sitting on his roof while all the other soldiers were fighting. If he had been where he was supposed to be, he wouldn't have seen that beautiful woman taking her clothes off. And he would have avoided the biggest blunder of his life.

What's your spiritual condition today? Have you folded up your uniform, hidden it in the closet and gone AWOL? If you are struggling with habitual sin, or if you are just spiritually bored, maybe you need to re-enlist.

Start sharing your faith. Pioneer a new ministry. Go on a mission trip. Rip up your excuses. Stir up your spiritual gifts and roll up your sleeves. It's time for war.

I'll see you in the battle.

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