

Rise of the Warrior

Cora Jakes Coleman knows how to wield the weapons of spiritual warfare. She shouts the praises of God, claims biblical promises and boldly declares the Lord's will in prayer. She's not afraid to go toe-to-toe with the devil and take authority in the Spirit. As a result, she's witnessed God's faithfulness many times—on others' behalf and her own.

But what does a prayer warrior do when the dream God gave her looks like it's about to die? Coleman had to wrestle with that very question the day doctors told her she would have a hard time conceiving. Her desire since childhood was to be a mother, but suddenly, all the prophetic words she had received about motherhood seemed like distant fantasies. In the spirit realm, it looked like Satan combating her spiritual productivity; in the natural, it looked like a hormonal disorder called Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS).

Looking back, Coleman now sees how God had to take her through that difficult journey of infertility to forge her into the prayer warrior she is today. She enjoys a vibrant ministry as an author, speaker and pastoral overseer of Destiny World Children's Ministry at The Potter's House Church. And as the firstborn of Bishop T.D. Jakes, Coleman loves to preach almost as much as she loves to war in prayer. But like most experienced warriors, Coleman remembers the original sting of her battle scars.

"When infertility first hit me, it devastated me," Coleman says. "It shattered my faith. It completely destroyed me. But it also birthed me in a way, I believe. The same thing the enemy uses for evil, we know God will turn it around for good. So although I felt I was destroyed, broken and, for lack of a better term, 'damaged goods,' God was able to show me how I could use my ministry in the barren place to bring other people beauty."

Coleman's battle began when she started getting ovarian cysts at the age of 14, but doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong. She spent the next eight years suffering from PCOS without even knowing it—until a car crash revealed the truth.

"I would not have known how bad my reproductive system was, or how damaged it could have become, had I never gotten into that car accident," she says. "And if I hadn't gotten into that car accident, I could have risked my whole reproductive system shutting down only days after that crash. ... Finally, a doctor was just honest, and said, 'You know, I don't know what it is. But I know it's not supposed to be inside of you. And we need to get you into surgery immediately.'"

She found out days after the surgery that the doctor had removed one of her ovaries and a fallopian tube. Less than a year later, she married the love of her life, Richard Coleman, but doctors warned her it would be difficult to conceive.

Coleman was devastated, yet knew her battle wasn't with the doctors or even with her own body. Her battle was with a spiritual foe.

"Infertility was not just about conceiving a child but conceiving at all—conceiving a dream, purpose, businesses, books," she says. "The enemy was attacking my ability to produce. So I had to pray because I was under attack for my productivity."

The Colemans tried in vitro fertilization (IVF), but each attempt failed. Instead of waving the proverbial white flag, though, Coleman chose to pray.

"I knew that it couldn't be some little patty-cake prayer, but I had to really war against unproductivity in my life," she says. "So I got into a prayer life that continues to change me even now. Since that moment, my prayer life is my biggest, if not my strongest, weapon."

Coleman says the weapon of prayer bore miraculous fruit. For each failed IVF cycle, she and her husband were able to adopt soon after. After all, Coleman says, it isn't just giving birth that makes a woman a mother. After the first failed IVF cycle, the Colemans adopted Amauri, who is now 11 years old. And Jason—affectionately known as “Tuga”—joined the family at birth, only four months after the second IVF cycle failed four years ago.

“Both of my children’s adoptions were long, tedious battles,” Coleman says. “And I wouldn’t change it for the world, because they are my heart babies. I birthed them in my heart.”

Coleman’s fierce battle with infertility inspired her to write her latest book, *Ferocious Warrior*.

“Spiritual warfare is not just really loud praying,” she explains. “Spiritual warfare is about the enemy trying to take what he doesn’t have the authority to take and you establishing and taking authority. ... There is a weapon in the stomping of your feet, there is a weapon in your praise, there is a weapon in your worship, and there is a weapon in the very way that you consider God in the war. And so spiritual warfare is not just about your praying, but it’s fasting and praying and worshipping and reading the Word of God, which is our greatest sword against the enemy.”

Praying With Authority

From the moment of Coleman’s own conception, prayer has played a significant role in her life. Bishop Jakes and his wife, Serita, went through their own battle with infertility after their marriage in 1980. It took seven years of prayer and spiritual warfare to give birth to Coleman. But the devil’s attacks didn’t end there.

“After the birth, the enemy still attacked me even as a little girl,” she says. “When I was about 4 months old, I got a bacterial infection, and the doctor said I was not going to

make it. So they had to rush me to the hospital. They could not find a vein to put an IV in, so they put IVs into my head, but I snatched them out. My mom says my arms swelled up like a baby doll. And so even as a baby, the enemy has been trying to take me out of here. ... I am a product of faith and a product of prayer.”

Miracles like these are perhaps why Coleman has had the gift of intercession as long as she can remember. Her younger sister, Sarah Jakes Roberts, remembers her being a bold intercessor in the Jakes home.

“She would be 5 years old, and Cora would pray at dinner, Cora would pray at church,” Roberts says. “When Cora prays, ... she has faith for the thing she is praying for. And she has had that same faith since she was 5 up until now. She believes that when she calls on the name of Jesus, when she taps into heaven’s resources, and when she makes a mandate for what she wants to see in earth, it will happen.”

But even though Coleman grew up under her parents’ discipleship, she says she heard from God personally for the first time at 12 years old. Hearing the Holy Spirit’s audible voice sparked a desire in Coleman to know Jesus more.

“He told me I would go through everything a young woman goes through in order to minister effectively,” she says. “And with that wisdom, I would supersede the anointing my father has given me.”

Coleman has many reasons to respect her father, whom she describes as a fiery preacher who isn’t afraid to cast out demons with his God-given authority. She recalls how he delivered one woman who was controlled by a demon passed down from her mother and grandmother.

“I may have been 14 or 15,” Coleman says. “[This woman] was literally roaring like a lion, coming down the aisle and contorting her body in different positions. My father and my

mother were standing down there, and my father kept telling her, 'Come on, come on, come on.' And she kept roaring and screaming. It was a distorted type of roaring—I've never seen anything like it before and still have never seen anything like it since then. My father prayed and laid hands on her and spoke over her spirit, and she got delivered. She started running around the church and praising God with tears in her eyes."

That instance and others like it taught Coleman how to stand in her authority as a believer. She says that in all her 31 years of life, she has never seen her mother or father frightened by a demon or witch.

Now, Bishop Jakes gets to see his daughter walk in that same boldness.

"In all of my 42 years of ministry, I've not seen anyone with a more vibrant faith and fury," Bishop Jakes says. "Cora has such conviction and a relentless, bulldog faith that it seems to combust into an explosion of dogged tenacity when she is under attack. Her church, her family and the enemy have come to respect her ability to go to war for the promises of God. ... My daughter has totally redefined what it means to fight like a girl!"

Despite her father's fame as one of the most popular preachers in the U.S., Coleman says the Jakes family is as normal as can be. Her home life as a child didn't consist of constant Bible studies or "flinging oil around the house," she says. On the contrary, she describes a laid-back atmosphere full of goofy jokes, comfortable clothes and close-knit relationships. Even now, when Coleman isn't busy ministering, she can be found binge-watching television shows or playing with her kids. But growing up a famous preacher's daughter didn't spare her from tragedies many young women face. For instance, Coleman was molested as a child, and later on when she was an adult, her boyfriend date-raped her in her own apartment. Although she

wasn't abused on a consistent basis, that didn't make her experience any less traumatic.

"I used to have anxiety attacks every time I would think of him," she says of her ex-boyfriend. "It was actually during an anxiety attack from seeing him in church one Sunday that my Aunt Betty changed my whole mind. She said to me, 'Cora, you can't give anyone that kind of power, especially in environments where you know nothing is going to happen to you.' It was in that moment I realized I had to forgive him and everyone else who had hurt me for not having the capacity to love me with compassion. I also had to forgive myself for beating myself up about not being stronger than I thought I should be in the circumstance."

Coleman is not alone in her experience. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 3 women in the U.S. experience some form of sexual violence during their lifetime, and 1 in 5 women experience rape. And while statistics on sexual abuse in the church are scarce, the recent rise of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements reveals that harassment and abuse among Christians are far more common than once thought.

Yet Coleman refused to let sexual abuse define who she was. Instead, she pressed into God for healing: "Lots of prayer and reading the Word took place in this space. I wouldn't wish sexual abuse on my worst enemy, but going through that dark place gave me the power to fight back and not let anyone else take my light or power from me again."

Embracing a Prophetic Call

The same strength that carried Coleman through abuse empowered her to be a prophetic voice to Roberts when she got pregnant at 13. The two sisters—only about a year apart in age—always had a close relationship, but Roberts often felt out of place in a family full of ministers.

“Growing up, I didn’t feel like I wanted to be a preacher [like Cora did],” Roberts says. “At that time, I felt very isolated. And then when I had my pregnancy, I felt even more isolated. And Cora really believed, ‘Sis, you’re going to get through this. Sis, you’re going to be fine.’ She told me, ‘You’re a healer.’ And I didn’t know what she meant by that.”

Coleman’s words to her sister proved true. Now, 16 years after Roberts gave birth to her firstborn, Malachi, she has an extensive ministry called Woman Evolved. She preaches at conferences and on tours, and she seeks to inspire her 1.1 million social-media followers toward Christlike living. And with followers like Rihanna, Roberts says she has the opportunity to minister to many outside the church.

“Because of the isolation I felt in the trenches, I’ve been able to help them heal and come back into relationship with God,” Roberts says. “So Cora knew that I was a healer, even in the midst of my brokenness, but she warred for me in the spirit realm. She warred for my son. So that in those moments where I didn’t have faith and I didn’t have belief, she had enough to get us through.”

That healing insight God gave Coleman for her sister comes from her prophetic anointing. She says God has given her a twofold prophetic gift, the first of which comes in the form of words of knowledge for the purpose of inner healing. The second part of her prophetic gift, she says, is for “the reconstruction and revolution of the systems of the church. ... God is cultivating my prophetic gift to make me a general for the young generation.”

Coleman receives the latter type of prophetic words during her personal devotion times with the Lord. She says the Holy Spirit has been burdening her heart lately with where the church is sorely lacking.

“I believe that the church needs to be more focused on a fear

of the Lord instead of the fame or the platform,” she says. “And I think that some of our churches have neglected deliverance so that they can entertain. And so it’s really a need for the church to get back to the relationship portion of God. It is time for the church to get back to delivering people from things that have bound them and have kept them from moving forward in God. It is time for the church to get back to true, authentic worship and not performances, ego or even competition. I feel that we are very good at being programmatic, but we are not very good at producing change. And that is what is needed.”

To help reach that vision, Coleman strives to equip her followers with truth and hope. She says at the age of 18, she ran away from the call of God on her life to teach and empower believers, but over the years, she has learned to embrace it, even if some disapprove of her.

“God has been teaching me how to be OK with people not liking me,” she says. “He’s been teaching me how to be OK with being bold with my gifts and with my calling. ... One of the most important things is just being confident in my call and in my prophetic gifts, that I may walk in it in this time, because it’s needed.”

Coleman knows that whether the enemy uses others’ disapproval, sexual abuse or infertility to halt her productivity, her power to fight back comes from God. And if she’s learned anything from each intense battle, it’s that God is good and cannot change, even in the barren places.

“I can honestly say that had it not been for my battle with infertility, I’m not sure I would have become the woman I am today, the ferocious warrior who was created from that place,” she says. “I found out who I was in my barren place. I found beauty in the things that were supposed to break me. I learned who God is when [I was] going through our barren places more so than any other time.”

Coleman's faith in God's goodness is so strong that, even though she and her husband look forward to adopting more children, they still believe they will one day have a biological child.

"I've been dreaming about birthing my own son since I was 10 years old," she says. "And I have received too many prophetic words, too many confirmations that it's going to happen. So we're just waiting on the Lord and being of good courage until it's time for us to reap."

Refusing to lose faith in what God promised—for Coleman, that's what it means to be a ferocious warrior. {eoa}

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