

“Warrior—The Wounded Warrior”

So, today we're in this series called "Warrior." And this is really aimed at the men. Women, there's plenty in here for you, too, so don't tune this out. But this is for the men; it's about men owning who they really are. Who God created them to be. We're created in the image of God with the heart of a warrior. A warrior who is to seek out the right causes to fight for. Because if we don't find those causes, the we'll fight against the wrong causes and self-destruct.

And men, it's important that we take this journey, because if we don't own our warrior side, then we get bored, and when we get bored, we get stupid. We do stupid things. God has purpose for you to live out and to fully live it out, men, we've got to own that God made us to be warriors.

Last week I mentioned some of the movies that men watch and it wakes that inner warrior. *Braveheart, The Last Samurai, Gladiator, Taken, I Am Legend*. If it's been a while since you watched a movie like that, do it. Tell your wife, "Aaron said I had to watch this..." And do it. But here's the thing about movies and stories like this, the battle is going, and the arrows are flying and the swords are slicing. And the hero just keeps on. You get sliced, you just keep going. You get shot with an arrow. What do you do? You break it off and keep going. Gunshots, no big deal! The hero, the warrior, just keeps on fighting! And here's the problem with that. Those images tend to train men not to acknowledge when they are hurt, which is very true for most of us. You fall off the step ladder while you're decorating the Christmas tree, right there in front of your whole family, you broke three ribs, but you're all, "I'm fine, I'm good, no problem. I'll catch my breath in a...few weeks."

Years ago I had a little minor surgery on my tailbone that required the wound to be packed with gauze every day and unpacked later. It was excruciating. The doctor told me to have Janet pull the gauze packing out. She tried to help me once. But it was so painful. I had to ask her to leave, so I could unpack it by myself and nobody could see me writhe in pain.

You don't want to acknowledge when you are hurt, and the challenge is, there are a lot of very wounded warriors, who don't want to acknowledge the wound, and therefore, find it very difficult to discover real spiritual healing.

John Eldredge does a great job of getting at one of the deepest wounds that men experience in his book *Wild at Heart*. And it's something that's painful really, just to talk about, but if we don't, the festering just continues. Eldredge says that every man carries a wound, and that wound is almost always given by his father.

I've got to say that I don't really want to talk about this and tried avoiding it, but I think it's very, very important that we acknowledge this.

Those of you who had a great relationship with your dad, or you have great relationships with your children, you are very, very blessed. Unfortunately though, many did not experience that. In fact, there was a man named Robert Bly, who was an author and a poet, who coined the phrase "The father wound". And what he showed is that it's very common for a son to feel wounded by a father. That doesn't mean that a father is always going to wound the son. It doesn't even mean that it's always the father's fault. Sometimes, the father can be very offensive, and abrasive, and hurtful. Sometimes, the son just misinterprets the father's actions, but it is very common for a son to feel wounded by his father.

In fact, as you search through scripture, you can see all sorts of examples of, of tragic father/son relationships. One of the classics is David and his son, Absalom, just a heart-breaking story of a father and his son's relationship gone bad. You can read about Isaac and Jacob and Esau and this battle between two brothers, for the father's blessing, and the tension and the jealousy, and the hatred. You can look at Joseph and his brothers, and you see a story of favoritism. In scripture you see these father/son relationships and you see sons who felt let down, and you see envy, and

you see attempted murder and brothers not liking each other, because they're positioning themselves for the father's love and approval.

Even in the parables of Jesus in the New Testament, Luke 15, Jesus tells a story about a father who had two sons, and the younger son didn't like the way his dad was running the estate, and so he said, "Dad, I want out of here. I don't want to do it your way. Give me what's mine. I'm going to go live my life the way I want to. I reject you, dad," and so the son did that, a very common story. Well, eventually, the son realized that his father was a good guy and being back with him was a better way to go, and so he came home humbled and repentant, and all of a sudden, the older brother was upset. Why? Because the father accepted the younger son. And the older brother was like, "This isn't fair. You're going easy on him. You've always favored him. You've never thrown a big party for me. This isn't fair, dad."

John Eldredge writes that some wounds come from our fathers because they never answer the biggest question for us as boys moving into adulthood. The question every boy needs answered, primarily from his father is, "**Do I have what it takes?** Am I powerful? Am I a man?" And until a man knows he's a man, he will always be trying to prove he is one. And at the very same time, he'll shrink back from anything that might reveal that he's not one. A man looks first to his father to answer that question. And if his father doesn't answer it, or answers it in a destructive way, the wound is opened up.

Eldredge tells about a young boy named Charles who loved to play the piano, but his father was jock. One day his dad came back from the gym and found him at the keyboard, and who knows what had build up for him to do this, but said to his son, "You are such a faggot." The wound can happen as an assault, or it can happen as an absence. Either way, the question doesn't really get answered.

Some of you, you are grown warriors, but inside, there is a little six-year-old boy, a twelve-year-old boy, a fourteen-year-old boy that's saying, "Dad, why? Dad, why'd you think that making more money was really going to make us happy? Why couldn't you have been with us? Dad, why'd you drink all the time? Dad, why did you treat mom like you did? Dad, dad, why were you there, but not there? Dad, why'd, why did you leave us? I mean, could I have done something better?" Some of you didn't grow up with a dad, maybe he died when you were young, or just left the picture and that's a wound. Maybe it wasn't even his fault, but you carry that wound today.

Now, I want to be very clear that this is not about bashing our fathers—that's pointless. But at the same time, we have to acknowledge that many of us, we carry significant and deep wounds, and we want God to heal those wounds so that we can be the men, the warriors, we have the potential to be.

If that's you today, and I know there's so many of you, my prayer is that you would experience the very last verse of the Old Testament, when God said this, "I'm going to send a prophet, Elijah, and here is what he is going to do." Malachi 4:6, "**He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of their children to their, their fathers**" (Malachi 4:6). For those of you that may have a stained relationship with your dad, or a challenging relationship with your sons or your daughters, I pray today that God would turn your hearts to a place of healing where right now there is strain.

And men, here is why this is so important: Maybe you are a wounded warrior. You wanted your dad's approval. You wanted his affirmation. You wanted him to validate you as a young warrior, and for whatever reason, you didn't get it. Here's what this does to us. The warrior, who was starved for his father's approval, is sentenced to a prison of performance. The warrior who is craving,

“Daddy, tell me I did good. Daddy, tell me I’m valuable. Dad, tell me I’m special.” The warrior who’s craving that from his earthly father is sentenced to this prison of performance.

The young warrior who grows up tends to think, “My worth is based on what I do. If I accomplish enough, then my father may say, ‘Well done. You hit it good, son,’ ” and so, this warrior has a warped mindset that often bleeds over into his image of his Heavenly Father, and he feels like no matter what he does, it’s not enough. “I still mess up, so therefore, I don’t feel loved. And I tried to achieve more, hoping to gain some approval from my earthly father or my Heavenly Father, but no matter what I do, I never quite feel like I’m good enough.” The whole time, this wounded warrior is just craving that someone would say, “I love you, not for what you do, but instead, just for who you are. Just for who you are,” and until the wounded warrior heals and learns to accept unconditional love, he will be cursed to a life of trying to perform for someone else’s approval. And that is where so many of us are as warriors.

Why, why do we need to heal? Well, some of us, we are hurt. We are carrying the wounds, and the problem is that hurt people tend to hurt people. If you have ever seen a hurt animal, they are dangerous. Many of you, you’re a wounded warrior, and you want so much to love those around you, but for some strange reason, you seem to hurt them over and over again. You don’t mean to, but that’s just kind of what happens, because you are a wounded person who needs healing.

How do we heal? Well, obviously, we can’t get to the bottom of that in one day, but I want to show you some scriptural principles that are essential in healing from the wounds of life. The first one is this. **The warrior must forgive his father through Christ.** It’s not easy, but it is possible. Some of you may say, “How could I ever forgive?” By the power of God, you can. Colossians 3:13 is very direct. **“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13, NIV).** That’s how we do it. That’s how we forgive that which seems unforgivable. We forgive as the Lord forgave us.

And a quick lesson in forgiveness: It’s a choice. Forgiveness is always a decision and never a feeling. It’s an act of will. If you wait to forgive until you feel like it, you will never do it. Feelings of forgiveness follow the choice to forgive. The warrior must forgive his father through Christ.

Now, some of you, you may have forgiven, but there is actually a healing step that goes beyond that, that many people have not done, and that is this. The warrior must not only forgive, but he must also **accept his father through Christ.** Here is what scripture says. **“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 15:7, NIV).** So, not only do we forgive, but we go a step beyond that, and that is to accept the person. It doesn’t mean you have to accept the painful actions. You don’t have to accept that, but you learn to accept the person.

Forgive and accept. That’s where it starts, but even that’s not enough. That’s easy compared to what’s next. And that’s **inviting Jesus into the wound.** That’s what we need most, and that’s what he wants. Jesus said, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NIV).** When Jesus says that he’s not berating us. He’s not saying under his breath, “I wish they’d pull it together and stop needing me so much.” Not at all. We were made to depend on God; we were made for union with Jesus and nothing about us works right without it. We need to allow him into the deepest wound.

Real warriors know this and live it. King David, one of the greatest warriors ever on the face of the earth knew this. He said, **“I love you, O Lord, my strength.” “But you, O Lord, be not far off,**

O my Strength, come quickly to help me.” David said, **“O my Strength, I watch for you, you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God” (Psalm 18:1, 22:19, 59:9).** This great warrior of God was unashamed to admit his desperate dependence on God.

David wasn't ashamed to say he needed God. God isn't in the shaming business. Do not buy into the lie that you have to suck it up and run wounded or else you're not a real man. Do you know what Jesus said was his main mission? When he stood up to speak for the first time, do you know what he said he had come to do? He quoted the prophet Isaiah. He said, **“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1, NIV).**

Listen, that is the passage central to Jesus' whole purpose. So take him at his word—ask him to heal all the broken places within you and unite them into one whole and healed heart. Ask him to release you from all bondage and captivity, just like he promised to do. But you see, you can't do this at a distance. You can't ask Jesus to enter your wound while you stand back. You have to go there with him.

Then finally this. If you want to be the warrior you have the potential to be; if you want figure out the real you. Then you've got to ask God this question: **What do you really think of me, God?** You ask that question and you stay with it until you have an answer. Because you can read books, and search the scriptures, and listen to talks about how God says you have a good heart, and you are a warrior, and you are powerful, and you do have what it takes. You can read that and hear it all you want, but until you hear it from God, you won't really know who you are.

Monday I made a trip to Columbia and for a grant presentation. That afternoon I got a text from a number I didn't recognize. The text simply asked how the presentation went. I texted back, “Fine, I think. Who is this?” The reply came back, “This is God.” I texted back, “So God, how am I doing.” The reply, “I am well pleased my son.” It was my friend John. But I got to tell you, there is something deep in me that really wanted that to be God answering the question, “What do you really think of me?”

God says, “You are forgiven, your heart new, it is good, you are my friend, you are a powerful warrior.”

Men, we're all wounded warriors and it's crucial that we not just walk around hiding the wound, or all we'll do is wound others. We acknowledge it, we forgive, we accept, we depend on God, we invite Jesus into the wound, we ask God what he really thinks of us until we get an answer. And then...and then...and then...look out world, look out evil, look out suffering, look out all you posers. Here we come. Here we come. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank John Eldredge for the resources I've used from his book Wild at Heart. If you haven't read it, READ IT! I also thank Rev. Craig Groeshel of Lifechurch in Oklahoma City, for his resources.