

# *It's a War*

WAKE UP TO THE BATTLE RAGING ALL AROUND YOU

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*For everything there is a season... a time to love and  
a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.*  
Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8, MEV

*Patient* is not an adjective that usually describes me. That day was no exception. As I sat in a very uncomfortable chair, I shifted my weight from one side to the other. I listened to the steps in the hallway as doctors and nurses passed by. The voices were too muffled for me to hear what they were saying. I sensed someone draw near to the door, but then they passed on by. My heart skipped a beat and my palms sweated.

I distracted myself by focusing on the clicking of the air conditioning unit and the poor choice of paint color on the wall, doing everything I could to divert my mind from the reality of where I was and the possibility of what I might hear in the next few moments. It seemed to take forever.

My thoughts drifted to the words my husband said to me just the week before when I limped into the kitchen. “Jan, if

you don't get that taken care of, you won't be able to go to Egypt." He got my attention.

I love to travel, especially on mission trips. Growing up in the Bible belt, it seemed to me like everyone was a Christian and regularly attended church. I hardly knew any unbelievers. I had always heard there were many people in the world who did not know Jesus, but when I started visiting foreign countries, I saw the magnitude of the lost.

In 2009, when I heard about a mission trip to Egypt, I couldn't wait to sign up. Preparing for the trip required a tremendous amount of planning, on top of all my usual life stuff. In the end I focused so much on taking care of everything and everyone else I didn't take very good care of myself.

One day, as I sat at the conference table in my office, I experienced an intense shooting pain in my hip. For a couple of weeks, every time I'd get up or down, my hip hurt. It got better but then got worse again. The pain became so bad I couldn't wear high heels, and I started dragging my leg a little bit.

But I can be hardheaded sometimes. Only at Mark's insistence, and with the threat of missing the trip to Egypt, did I stop and give the matter some attention.

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are for centuries, especially when they find  
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I made an appointment with an orthopedist. Two days after seeing him, I went in for an MRI of my hip.

A week later Mark and I returned to get my test results. The doctor opened his computer and showed us the MRI. He pointed at a portion of my hip and explained the tissue was soft and expanding, which was indicative of a possible tumor.

Tumor? My husband and I stared at him, and then at each other, both of us speechless.

The following Monday I went to the hospital for more tests. During a bone scan, the nurse casually asked, "When was the last time you had a mammogram?"

Over the past several years I'd scheduled a mammogram three times; all three times I cancelled the appointment due to my overbooked calendar. (Maybe you can relate. Sometimes I get so busy taking care of others I forget to take care of myself.) Her comment frightened me and tears began to slip down my face. I quietly mumbled something in return, not wanting to let her know how her comment impacted me.

When I finished the scan I was whisked down the hall to radiology for a mammogram and ultrasound. Then I was escorted to that uncomfortable chair in that ugly room I mentioned earlier where I waited alone to see what the consequences would be for overlooking my health.

### **I AM WOMAN**

When I was a teenager, my dad bought me a bright yellow minibike. We lived in the country where the mailbox was a mile away, the nearest neighbor was down the road and

around the corner, and I was more likely to see a cow than a human any day of the week. That little motorcycle gave me freedom to go places and to do things I would never have been able to do without it.

One day as I drove my minibike down the road to visit a friend, wind whipping my hair every which way, I pulled back the throttle and sang at the top of my lungs the Helen Reddy song “I Am Woman.”

At this point in my life I had no idea what it meant to be a woman, but I identified with the powerful declarations in those lyrics.

Women often feel the need to declare their femininity. To own it. To fight for it.

I pondered the parallel between that battle and the one I faced in the waiting room that day. Women have been fighting to be who they are for centuries, especially when they find themselves in situations and circumstances that leave them feeling stripped of their femininity.

I snapped out of my memories and back to the moment as I sat in the chair. My heart cried out, “*I am woman! Don’t take that away from me!*”

Finally, the radiologist arrived and my fears were realized. “Mrs. Greenwood, you have stage IV breast cancer, and it’s metastasized to your hip.”

My world spun out of control. I felt weak. Stunned. Shattered.

I knew enough about cancer to understand what I was facing. Cancer would try to steal my femininity, waging an assault on my body, which would threaten the core of who I was. Chemotherapy would sap my strength and expose me

to a variety of frightening consequences. It would cause my hair to fall out. Surgical intervention would mean losing one or both of my breasts. My natural strength and zeal for life would be tempered by fatigue and worry. In one fell swoop, I would be bereft of the things that most identified me as a woman. But even more fearful than the effect on my appearance was the very real threat I might die.

I had been attacked—blindsided really—by a vicious, insidious foe that was trying to take my life as the “spoils of war.”

**THE GREAT I AM**

Within a week of my diagnosis I endured a battery of additional tests and procedures. Two weeks after the diagnosis, I began chemotherapy.

I had become a *patient*.



**It became clear my deepest desire would  
be to leave them a legacy of love.**



Not long after my first round of chemo, Mark and I went to a church service. Everyone else stood for worship. I felt so tired and overwhelmed I just sat there.

I closed my eyes, and suddenly it was as if I had entered a room where Jesus was waiting for me.

In my frustration, fatigue, fear, and anger, I confronted Him. “Are You really like this? Are You harsh? Is this some kind of punishment?”

He didn't respond but just kept looking at me with compassion while I vented.

When I finally ran out of steam, I became silent. After a few tense moments I asked the true question on my heart. "Are You going to heal me?"

"I Am," He responded.

I knew what He was saying. Not just "I am going to heal you." He spoke His name to me and revealed His character—the Great I Am. Reminding me who He is, He was saying, "No matter what, Jan, I am enough."

His calm response settled me. Hope began to flicker. In a moment, with my anger and desperation poured out, His peace enveloped me. The weight of His words wrapped around me like a blanket—the Comforter—surrounding my soul. I began to believe God was going to heal me. I knew "I Am" would be with me every step of the way. It was enough.

### **THE BATTLE FOR WOMANHOOD**

I began an intensive year and a half of aggressive treatments—and a lifelong assignment to pursue, apprehend, and maintain my health. After nineteen rounds of chemotherapy, a lumpectomy, and a full round of radiation therapy, God did heal me. I am well.

Coming face-to-face with my mortality changed my perspective and my priorities. Mark and I gave serious consideration to the value we place on family, faith, and friends. I needed to measure my days and carefully consider what my legacy would be.

During the treatment process, I often looked into the faces of my children, feeling the depth of my love for them.

If I could only do a few things before my death, what would I choose? What would my last words be? What treasure would I bestow on them?

It became clear my deepest desire would be to leave them a legacy of love.

I held my children in my arms and told them, “I love you.” I asked them to forgive me for the times I’d caused them pain. I talked about the faithfulness of our God and assured them of His willingness to heal all our hurts—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

But I decided I wouldn’t stop there. I would start a revolution of love that would go beyond my own children and reach women everywhere. For years the Lord had been teaching me about the battle raging for our femininity and our relationships. He had been speaking to me about the power of love to restore them. I wanted to share what I’d learned while exposing the threats, lies, and wounds women impose on one another—first for the benefit of my daughter, Ashley...and then for my future daughters-in-law...and finally for all the women I love, even for those I didn’t personally know.

### **WINNING THE WAR**

I wish I could tell you I was spared the ravages of my war against cancer or give you a story of instant healing without suffering. The truth is I experienced grueling negative side effects from my chemotherapy treatment. My hair fell out, challenging my self-esteem. I had to surrender the diseased portion of my breast to surgery and faced terrible battles with fear. I walked with a painful limp for a long time, and it

has taken me years to regain my physical strength. I didn't get to make the trip to Egypt that was so important to me, and I tasted the disappointment of lost opportunity.

But I have won some major battles along the way. In the process of walking through this frightening season, I overcame not only cancer but also many of my fears, wounds, and insecurities. I found the courage to fight for my womanhood on both the natural and the supernatural fields. I discovered I am eternally secure in the hands of a loving, warring Savior who proves His faithfulness to me over and over. I have retained my femininity and embraced its power. I now know who I am is only superficially related to my physical appearance.

Now when I hear or say, "I am," it gives me a boost of strength as I recall God's message to me of His love and power. Every day I remind myself, "I am well. I am woman."

The same God who championed me through my struggle with cancer can bring about victory in the war for our femininity as well. I now know no disease, weapon, or wound can steal who we are. Our enemy is strong, but this battle does not have to overwhelm us. Let me assure you, we are on the winning side. When women come together, united in love, we are powerful.

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#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

Maybe you've been in a battle similar to mine. Maybe it hasn't been a fight for your health, but rather a fight for your family or your values or your faith. I'd like you to

consider your own story as you begin these first moments of reflection. Think about your journey—where you began and how far you've come. From this position we will begin to dig a little deeper into your perspective on your gender and the female relationships all around you. Now is a good time to open your journal and begin to record your experiences and thoughts.

What does “femininity” mean to you? What does it mean to be a woman?

Describe one or two of the most important female relationships in your life. Are/Were these positive or negative experiences? Why?

Describe a moment or a season when you began to realize there was a war among women. What was happening in your life?

How did you respond to those circumstances? How did you respond to God in those circumstances? Take a minute to process this moment or this season with God.

Let's pause here and ask God some questions. Maybe this is a new way of communicating with God. He loves to speak to His daughters to tell us the truth about how He sees us and loves us. Just stop for a moment and get quiet. Don't be

afraid; He's a good God. He's gentle and kind, and He loves you very much. He speaks in thoughts or in pictures, and sometimes in just an impression. Listen.

God, what lies have I believed about me as a woman?

What lies have I believed about my femininity?

What is the truth about me? About my femininity?

Write down what you hear. (This would be a great moment to make your first entry in your journal.) If it makes you feel yucky or ashamed, it's not God. On the other hand, if it makes you feel loved and valued, it most assuredly is God!

Take what He said about you and your femininity and declare it! Write it down or even share it. Boldly declare the truth of what God says about who you are!