

Dive Deep with LeRoy and Kimberly Wagner

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Jill Savage: Well, we are so excited to have LeRoy and Kimberly Wagner joining us for this month's Dive Deep interview. LeRoy and Kimberly have written a couple of books that were very transformational in our marriage.

Mark Savage: Absolutely.

JS: And so, we were so excited when we were able to have them as a guest for you here in No More Perfect Date Night. Welcome, LeRoy and Kimberly.

Leroy Wagner: Hi. Thank you.

Kimberly Wagner: So good to be with you.

JS: Thank you. Well, as we shared your books, *Fierce Woman* and *Men who Love Fierce Women*. Women. Woman. [laughter] Men who love a fierce women? I don't know exactly how that was; what's the right context for that?

KW: *Men who Love Fierce Women*, but it probably should have been "Man who Loves a Fierce Woman". [laughter]

MS: Yeah.

JS: So yeah, they were huge for us because we realized in reading them that we were experiencing some of the dynamics that you experienced in your marriage. So, we'd love to hear a little of your story. Specifically, about what led you to write the books. And I know, Kimberly, your book *Fierce Women* came first. So, what led you to do that? And LeRoy, what led you to make that second book, *Men who Love Fierce Women*? Tell us a little bit of that story.

KW: Well, I didn't set out to write a book at the time. I'm a blogger with the True Woman Movement with Revive Our Hearts, and I'd written a series for them on, "Preparing a Safe Place for Your Man". I talked about how many strong women intimidate their men without even knowing it, which I had done. Greg Thornton, at Moody, saw that blog series, approached me and asked me about writing a book for women, particularly women who were fierce. And so that's how it started. But as far as our story, how God broke in and worked in our lives, we went through 15-17 years of just very dark, hard times maritally. We didn't realize what was happening. We didn't know what the problem was. I kept thinking if he would just get his act together, if he would be more attentive to me, if he would just show me more attention or whatever, all of these things. I was pointing the finger at him. He was pointing the finger at me. And we were miserable. I didn't even realize that he was depressed.

KW: I had a wise friend one day tell say to me, "You know, I think LeRoy may be intimidated by you." And I just about laughed in her face because I've never even considered that. And it really was

a gracious work of the Lord, where he used His word to open my eyes to the fact that I was not loving my husband well. In Titus Chapter 2, a lot of times we'll refer to that kind of as the handbook to be a biblical woman, it talks about how the older women are to train the younger women to do certain things. They are to love their husbands, love their children, and there's a long list of things we're to do or be. Like, to be kind. And at the end of that list, I came to that phrase that says, "Love your husband, so that the word of God will not be blasphemed." Woah, the Holy Spirit so got me. Because at that time, I would say, "I love the Lord with all my heart. I wanna glorify God." And yet, the Holy Spirit graciously opened my eyes to the fact that, the way I was treating my husband, not only was that cruel to him, but I was not glorifying God. I was saying to the world, "Yeah, the Bible says that you can love your husbands, that you can be gentle, you can display the fruit of the Spirit. You can be kind, but I can't...but I won't," or whatever. There's no power in the Word is what my life was saying by how I was treating him.

MS: Wow!

KW: And that was the breaking point, that was the beginning, just for me to get on my face before God and say, "Oh, I have been so wrong, so wrong." And as I confess that, Jill and Mark, God began opening my eyes to all of the ways that I had sinned against my husband. Before that, all I could do was blame him and see everything he was doing wrong. And the more I blamed him in my heart, even if I didn't voice it, the angrier I got at him, the more I resented him. When he would call home on the telephone I would give the cold shoulder or whatever because I was constantly punishing him without him knowing what I was doing or why I was mad, or why I was upset. I was hurt, and I just continued to hurt him out of my hurt.

JS: Did he not measure up in your mind?

KW: Yeah. He did not measure up at all to the ideal I had of him. And I know he'll share his part here in a minute. He thought he was doing everything right. He was a great guy and well, I was privileged to have him. [laughter]

KW: And so, we were both pointing the finger at each other and going nowhere except getting darker and darker and more miserable. But once I confessed to the Lord and recognized my part in it, the Lord started opening my eyes to more and more things. And I just started writing it out on a notepad, this huge legal pad that I started filling up with things that I wasn't even having to think of it. The Lord was flooding my mind with memories, the sick things, of ways I had harmed him. I had hurt him, I had emasculated him. I had taken the lead and I had just taken over and squashed him in many ways. I shared that with LeRoy, and that began a real turning point in my heart. It didn't yet affect him fully, but that was the first step.

JS: Wow. So, Leroy, what was going on in your head in your heart during this time?

LW: Well, like most men that are geared the way I am, I'm not combative. I hate confrontation. I'm not an emotional person. And so, as she hurt me, I just began to back farther and farther into my cave. I was just doing what I had to do to keep this machine going, called marriage. I was also in ministry. One of the things that surprised me is how prevalent this is in ministry. The fierce woman/fearful man cycle. I could do everything outside of the home well; I thought that I was doing a good job. Church was growing. I could do the confrontation, I could deal with the hard stuff at church, but I was a miserable failure as a husband and I knew it. And I think a man, he can be successful in

every other arena in his life. But if he fails at home, he is at a point where he thinks, "I'm not the man that I'm supposed to be." You just know it intuitively, especially if you're a Christian, and I even kind of told myself, "You're the honorable victim here. She keeps just bashing you and bashing you and you don't confront, you don't fight back." I saw myself as, "I'm really the good guy here. I don't fight. I don't participate in the arguments. I just back farther and farther in my cave." I didn't realize how sinful that was.

MS: Sure, yeah. That really resonates with me because I don't like conflict at home. I don't like it outside of the home either. But we had that dance going between that fierceness and that fearfulness, and I think it was great that you put words to what was happening. And then from your journey we, in a way, learned how to stop the dance.

JS: Yeah. I remember one particular night, and it was when we were separated about eight years ago, I was reading a book. I had not even seen your book yet, but I was reading another book called the "God Empowered Wife", and it really talked about many of the same things. But one of the things she talked about is how she was convicted of how much she had emasculated her husband. I remember, I was reading the book at 2:00 AM, and we were living apart, and I called him and just bawled my eyes out and said, "I've done this to you. I am so sorry". That was the moment that we began to turn around, and it was shortly thereafter that somebody put your book in Mark's hands or I don't even remember how we saw it, but he read it first and was like, "this is us".

KW: Jill, that's so important what you just said and what you did. And what I hope couples listening to this will take note of is just to say, "I'm sorry, I was wrong". Even still now, if it's a small thing, it hasn't built up to that extent, but to be quick to say, "Will you forgive me? I should not have spoken to you in that tone," or "I should not have reacted that way", or "that was wrong of me". And that's what keeps marriages united in oneness and really empowered by the Spirit, because it's right to tell the truth. We must do that, but it's conveying honesty with humility.

JS: Yes.

LW: Repentance is the key component to a grace-filled marriage. You were at that point where the Lord just convicted you, and you were responsive in repentance to call Mark. That is the way it must begin in every marriage that's in trouble. Repentance is the key.

JS: It is. So, let's talk for a moment about what is a fierce woman contributing negatively to the marriage, but then also what is a fearful man contributing negatively to the marriage? Can we talk about both sides of that? Because you made a statement a minute ago, LeRoy, that here you were taking the higher road, but that was sinful. A lot of us are like, "What do you mean? I don't understand it." So, can you talk about each of those roles and what they are contributing negatively to the relationship?

KW: Well, to begin with, a fierce woman can usually be very highly opinionated, very strong willed, maybe a planner, an agenda maker. And in doing those things, you can shut down your husband and not leave room for him to lead or even give input. [chuckle] And so, I found a lot of times that, as a fierce woman, I need to take that fierce, strong will and bring it to the cross and say, "Father, what do you have for me today? How can I honor you by loving LeRoy well, by listening well, by walking in humility?" And when I say walking in humility, that doesn't mean I'm a doormat. LeRoy listens to me. He looks to me sometimes for leadership that *he* asks for. So, I'm not

trying to paint a picture of becoming a brainless woman who never speaks.

LW: Dumb as dishwater. [laughter]

JS: Well, what you're saying though, is learning to use your strength well. I'll speak for myself, but, I was abusing my strength.

KW: Yes, and using it under the Spirit's control. That's the whole key. Under the Spirit's control.

LW: And the point is, with us, I learned very, very quickly that I really over-married. I mean, I couldn't handle the woman that I had. Way too much woman for me. She was smarter than me. She could plan better than me. Her family is a very emotive family. They discussed, they debated every single thing. I came from a family where whatever my dad said, there was no discussion. Nobody said anything. So, she knew how to dance this dance much, much better than I and always come out on top.

LW: And for me, as a husband, the reason why that was sinful, even though we were in that destructive dance that led to our marital misery, is that, first of all, it wasn't biblical. The man is called to lead. He's not called to be abusive. He's not called to lord over his wife, but he is called to lead her spiritually. And when you read 1 Peter 3, in the husband and wife verses there, you read words like, "called for a blessing" and "Your life is to be a blessing. You're to love good, you're to see good days and love life." And we *weren't* seeing good days and loving life. The man is primarily responsible for leading his wife, for leading his home to be a blessing to the Lord Jesus and to be a blessing to others. Whether we feel like we're capable or not of doing that. I felt she was much more capable than I at everything, so I said, "You just take over. You just do it. You handle it. That way there'll be less conflict." I was just looking for an easy way out, and that's sinful. And so, the Lord challenged me with His Word to do the hard thing. And it is hard, but it's what God blesses. God always blesses obedience to His Word.

MS: Yeah.

LW: That doesn't mean it's going to be easy, but He always blesses obedience to His Word.

MS: Yeah, I remember for me, my marriage was a mess. This new relationship that I had, that was going to be an easier relationship, was a mess. I was a mess. And it was Easter Sunday, 2012, and I had been praying that Easter would be more than bunnies and candy, which we never celebrated it that way, but I wanted something powerful to happen. It was on that day that I had my own resurrection. I heard the Lord speak to me that if I would trust Him for the mess, He would take care of it. I think that was the first time in my life that I really repented of lordship. I had always looked to Christ as my Savior, and I would have said that He was my Lord, but I was still the lord in my life. And just going back to what you said about how God works in His Word, when you're obedient to His Word, you get out of the way and He does His thing. And part of that resurrection was: I had to learn how to love Jill, because I was really loving her based upon what I was going to get out of it. I had to completely change that around and love Jill based upon what the Lord was saying not upon my own benefit, and there was a huge difference.

LW: One of the hardest things for men to do is to pray with their wives.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Why is that?

LW: I don't know why that is. I could pray for everybody in the church and just pray with anyone, but I could not pray with Kim. First of all, our marriage was not where it should have been. I left the ministry because of that for a time because I felt like I was such a hypocrite preaching the Word, and here, I was not the spiritual leader at home. So, I could only carry on that charade for a short period of time. And then, I think that knowing that Kim was more spiritual than I was, I felt she could do everything better. She had a better relationship with the Lord, and I was intimidated to pray with her. But that's one of the simplest, yet most powerful ways that we men can provide spiritual leadership over our wives. To pray over them, to pray for their needs, to pray for their upcoming schedules, to pray for the different emotional needs that they might have. There is a spiritual umbrella of protection that the man provides with that simple yet powerful act of praying over his wife that is so underestimated by Christian men. It's powerful. Something happens in the heavenlies when men are praying over their wives.

KW: When LeRoy started doing that, it made the most significant change in our relationship. When he committed to never go another day without praying over me. And at first, it was hard for him and it was just prayer at night, but then eventually it worked into being throughout our day. That is the rhythm of our life and very much now more so than ever.

LW: It's about all I can do.

KW: And there would be times in those early days when we were coming out of the fierce woman/fearful man cycle, when I would be reverting back to the old, ugly fierce Kim. If the anger was rising within me or I was giving attitude, he'd say, "Babe, let's pray." And he'd take my hand and he'd just invite the Holy Spirit into that situation. He wouldn't do it in a condemning way toward me, or "Let me pray over you, you sinner."

LW: Use prayer as a weapon. [laughter]

KW: Yeah, it wasn't that at all. It was inviting the Holy Spirit in to come alongside us, to help us, to bring calmness and peace into the situation. And God would answer that. God would do that.

JS: That's beautiful. You've already answered the next question I was going to ask, which is, when you think about when you turned the corner, what was one or two things that you did to begin to change this cycle? And obviously on your side, LeRoy, prayer was huge, and you were leading with prayer. One of the things we talk about in *No More Perfect Marriages* is that we need the God-tool of courage, and that took a lot of courage, because I'm sure when you were starting to pray, you were probably shaking in your boots.

LW: Absolutely. It took courage to come out of that cave that I had retreated so far into. I thought I was just going to get shut down again, and she could shut me down pretty easily. But I learned, and the Lord taught me in my own time when he was dealing with my heart, that a fearful man cannot be a faithful man. Fear had always been a part of my life, even before I met Kim. I was a fearful person. And so, the Lord dealt with that and the Lord stressed to me that need for courage. That I'm going to have to stand up on my own two feet and then kneel back down and say, "Lord, I need you."

I don't have strength to do this. I'm afraid to lead her. I'm afraid to pray with her, but Lord, I know that's what you want me to do. And so, if you'll give the grace, I'll do it."

JS: Beautiful. Kimberly, what about you? When you think about just one or two practical steps for our listeners that are recognizing themselves in this, what would you say was something that was pretty key for you?

KW: Learning to listen to him. And what I mean by that is, if there's a decision that needs to be made or if we're discussing something, give him room to talk. Give him room to be able to share his heart and wait. Sometimes it takes a while. It takes a while for men to pray. If we're hit with something and a decision's going to need to be made, sometimes men take a while to process. They want to think through all the angles and...

LW: She is wanting it now.

KW: I want it. I'm decisive. Let's make a decision; let's go. So, it means I need to be patient and understanding. To be a student of him. To understand that he's not being lazy by not jumping to a conclusion automatically. That's the way he's made. That's the way he processes. So, become a student of the different ways that your husband operates and functions. Become a student of what speaks love to him, what encourages him, and be a true encourager of your husband. I have that acronym in the book on APPRECIATION, and I go through all the different ways that we can show appreciation to our husbands. A study has been done that has shown that the main reason for affairs, with men, is not about the sex; it's about whether they feel valued or appreciated by their wife.

JS: We certainly found that.

MS: Yeah.

JS: We had a dynamic too because I'm actually the one in our marriage that was the emotional avoider. I grew up in a home where we didn't do a lot of emotion. We weren't emotive. And that caused me to be very independent. That fed my strength and my independence, but what I didn't realize is, my independence was sending my husband an unintentional message that I didn't need him.

MS: In our discussions, I would say, "You don't need me." And, of course, she would say, "No, but I do." But I most certainly didn't feel appreciated or valued.

JS: Right, yeah. And I love that. Listening is huge. Mark often says that for him it's like there's a CD spinning in his head and it can't find the song.

LW: That's good. [chuckle]

JS: And so, once I have begun to understand that, I understand he's not delaying making his decision. He needs time to think through that and to think through his reasons why.

MS: Right.

JS: So, I appreciate that.

KW: Which, as a wife, if you jump on that and you jump in too soon, and you don't give him time to think through and process, then he'll just let you do that. And you start that pattern of, you become the one making all the decisions and the sole decision maker then becomes the leader. Then, the husband just gives up and says, "Okay."

LW: And the marriage is unbiblical, of course, in that sense.

MS: Yeah.

LW: One of the things that made the most difference in our lives is, we began to see marriage from a different perspective, an outside perspective, that marriage is not about us. It's not about me in a cave, or her leading. All of those things are things you need to work on. But our marriage is about glorifying God. And our marriage was not glorifying God. That was the real sin. That was the deepest issue. You cannot glorify God when you allow these types of components to continue, to remain in your marriage and to destroy it. God meant for our marriages to be a blessing to others, that others would see what the gospel is to look like, would see how good our God is. That they would see that, yes, marriage is hard; yes, you put two totally different people together, but God's grace can turn it into a wonderful, beautiful thing that lifts Him up to the world. "Taste and see that the Lord is good." In Psalms, it says, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of our lives". And that's what we wanted. We wanted people, when they saw our marriage, to think of God's goodness and God's mercy. And that is the key to a Christian marriage, I believe.

JS: Beautiful. Well you guys, let's turn a little corner here. Because you guys have been going through something very, very difficult over the last year. LeRoy has developed some huge health issues, a neurological issue, that almost a year ago took away your ability to walk. And so, you guys have been walking through this. You're virtually wheelchair-bound, other than when you can walk on some of the special crutches, but you're sitting in a chair most of the day. You guys are not able to go out as much as you have in the past. Talk to us about that. What have you had to adjust in your marriage? Has this brought back any of that fearful man...

MS: The old dance...

JS: Yeah. The old stuff? Talk about that journey with us.

KW: Well, we have said so many times that we are so thankful that God had established us with a good, good relationship for so many years. It's like he was preparing us to walk through this. Because it literally is a giving up of all things, a surrender to whatever the Lord has, and our lives are completely different than before. But we have the joy of one another. We spend a lot of time in prayer together, and not for ourselves, but there are so many people on our hearts. There are so many needs, and we're not running around here and there. We're able to be in the Word together and be praying together. There are a lot of challenges. There are days when I'm just weak, because I want us just to jump in the car and go hike a mountain together like we used to, and we can't do that right now. There are questions about the future. Finances is a big question.

JS: I bet.

KW: We don't know what the future holds. But I am so thankful that we have one another walking

through this together.

LW: One of the things that we've said to one another many times through this whole process is, "How do people go through serious chronic, long-term illness when there are problems in the marriage?" I just don't know how they do it. But Kim has just laid aside everything, and she has totally given herself to me. When you go through this, it's really harder on the caregiver than it is on the one who has the physical problem. She has just loved me with such a sacrificial love. It has deepened our love for one another. It has sweetened our love for one another and for the Lord. It's really been a gift to us, although it's been a very difficult time, because I just love her and appreciate her so much more than I ever have. And I need to do that because I depend upon her for everything, so I better love her. [laughter]

MS: Yeah.

JS: You're probably glad there is some leadership in her at this point in time. [laughter]

LW: That's right. But you know, although I can't do anything, and I've not been able to lead the church, the church has been so gracious to keep us on, waiting for something to happen. But I'm still able to lead even though I'm not able to do anything else.

KW: Case in point. I had some dear, well-meaning friends. Some of them are authors and speakers, but they knew we were going to be doing this today. It's a group that we pray together with, and some of them just really encouraged us to cancel and not to do this today. They thought that LeRoy wasn't going to be in good physical condition, and he didn't need this stress and everything. They were caring for him. And so, I conveyed that to him. I didn't make that decision. I conveyed that to him and let him make the decision. He said, "We will keep our commitment." [laughter]

KW: What is hard, though, about letting him lead through this season is there are times when I think he still thinks he can do it; he can do whatever. He wants to get out there and climb up on his tractor and mow 15 acres. But that's just not wise right now. And so, we'll have those discussions. [chuckle] It's a different dance right now where I'm, in a way, trying to hold him back in wisdom without emasculating him. And that is very hard.

MS: Right.

LW: And she does a great job, but I can still lead us in prayer. I can lead us in the Word and say, "Now, this is what the Lord showed me today. And, I thought this was a good word." And so, even if a man is almost completely incapable of doing anything physically, he can still lead his wife spiritually. That's one of the things that God has called us to do that we're still able to do. And I know that there are some couples out there listening that are probably going through the same thing.

MS: Oh, for sure.

LW: Don't just give up on what you're called to do, because if you're obedient in the smallest ways, God will pour grace upon grace. Grace heaped upon grace. So be obedient and watch God work.

MS: Yeah. You know, I've seen for men that so often when they don't know what to do, they'll do nothing. But what I've loved about what you just said is this very simple way a man can lead, but

yet it's so powerful. And, I know that for years Jill would crave for me to pray over her and with her. I was so fearful and so conflicted that I refused because I would never be enough. But yet, we're coming back to just a very simple way, but yet a powerful way, that I think our wives crave and that as men, we can lead.

KW: Yes.

LW: And what you've said, Mark, is so true. The enemy twists it and perverts it and says, "You will never be enough." That is the truth, you will never be enough. [chuckle]

MS: Right!

LW: But Christ is sufficient.

MS: Absolutely.

LW: So, go to the cross and say, "Oh Lord, I need You. Oh God, I cannot do this without You. I cannot lead my strong woman. I know I chose her, but You made her. [chuckle] I need Your help desperately." When we come to the cross with desperation, I believe the Lord meets us there with power.

JS: So true. So true.

MS: Yeah. It is.

JS: Well, we want to honor your time and your energy level, and we are grateful that you said that you would speak with us today. I know it's a sacrifice for you. And we want to thank you. We usually try to close with prayer. LeRoy, would you be willing to pray today for our couples that are watching this and have maybe identified with some of the things that we've been talking about and they're ready to take some next steps to make those changes?

LW: I would be honored to, and it's been an honor to be with you all today. You all are a joy. Thank God for the difference you're making in so many couples' lives.

JS: Thank you.

LW: Oh Lord, as we bow before You, just as Mark said earlier, You are the Lord, and that changes everything. Lord, I pray for couples to listen. Lord, they're hearing this, and Your Spirit is speaking to them, and it's pegging them right where they are. And Lord, I pray that You would give them courage, like Jill spoke of. Courage to step out of the cave, if it's a man, step out of the shadows, and run to the cross, run to Your Word, and cry out to be the man that You've called them to be, the husband that You've called them to be; that tender warrior who stands strong for his wife, who prays for her, learns to pray for her. God, I pray that You would be with women listening, that Lord, they've heard what Kim has said and what Jill has said. And I pray Lord, that they would see themselves in these words, and Lord, that they would fall on their knees in repentance and ask You, God, to touch their hearts, to touch their lives, that their marriage can be what glorifies You. And Lord, we want to glorify You with our marriages and with our lives. And thank You so much for Mark and Jill and their ministry. Thank You for those who are hearing today. May You bless each

one to the glory of Your great name. It is in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

JS: Amen.

MS: Amen.

JS: Thank you guys for joining us.