

ACTION

It's Just in My Heart

Told by Nick and Sandy Guerra, missionaries in Okinawa, Japan

A dear Marine friend of mine, now a pastor in Virginia, started Vibrant Men's Fellowship (VMF) in May of 1999. Joe approached me in April of 2000 and asked me to take over this ministry. Initially, I thought he was crazy and I quickly refused his invitation. Joe asked me to come and check it out just once because he was due to leave Okinawa in a month. I attended and had an opportunity to share some of my testimony, and something in me clicked. I took over in May of 2000, renamed the ministry Futenma Men's Fellowship (FMF) and have been there practically every Monday since.

One day, as my wife, Sandy, and I ministered in EMB (*Every Man's Battle, one of their weekly prison ministries*) the topic came up, "If women look for confidence in a man, what does a confident man look like?" Some responses: one who is sure; knows where he is going; is disciplined; can be trusted; fun to be around; blah-blah-blah (much struggling to define this guy!).



Nick and Sandy Guerra

We had to ask the flip side, "What does an insecure man (one who lacks confidence) look like?" Interestingly, we seemed to be more acquainted with this trait: he's the guy who walks in public with his girl and gets angry with every guy who looks at her; he's threatened by other guys that may (can) take his girl away; sometimes he knows he cannot whip the guys that do look, so instead he takes out his frustrations on his girlfriend, i.e. physical and verbal abuse. He's also the guy who watches the clock, and when she is late, he worries that she is fooling around. Often he's on the phone with her, not because he wants to hear her voice, he's monitoring her

whereabouts. He's smothering, clingy, manipulative and controlling. With this guy, there's little or no freedom. "Any of you know what I'm talking about? You ever been this guy? Even now?"

Song of Solomon 7:10 came to mind. *I am my Beloved's and his desire is for me.* I asked the men, "Are you confident in your relationship that she belongs to you and you belong to her?" I shared how at times I was that guy who walked around insecure and worried, but something happened. Christ began to renew my mind. As I continue to grow and mature in my relationship with Christ, He replaces my worries, fears, and feelings of worthlessness with assurance, faith, trust, maturity and confidence. I shared how great it feels to let go of those insecurities and not have to worry about things like, "Would she rather be with someone else? Is she thinking about him?"



(Nick on the left) This was Chris' first time out...we had already started...he got off work late but knew he wanted to come. He's been coming faithfully ever since.

I expressed that there are times when I get home in the evenings, unlock the door, go inside and I am tickled that Sandy is still there. Why? Because she chooses to be there! Sandy is free to go about her day, she has access to the credit cards and passports, but she keeps coming back home. She wants to be with me and I want to be with her (which is why I keep coming home every day, too.) How cool is that!?



One man, C, said he's afraid to give all of his heart to a girl because he knows the game and it is full of hurt and pain. He is very aware that he guards his heart, not wanting to get too close because, as he put it, "It's not worth the pain." I told him that I agree that relationships can be risky, but they can also be rewarding. To achieve true, fulfilling intimacy, relationships should be developed slowly and carefully without compromise, sin, or shame.

I was introducing the new book that we would be diving into – "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" – and I recall asking the many single men and women their thoughts at the notion of abandoning today's concept of dating. This was met with mild shock, immediate resistance, and panic. We pressed on anyway. Each of the singles loved the book and expressed things like, "I wish I would've know this stuff earlier."

Lastly, Sandy and I received permission to go into Special Quarters, or Segregation (Seg). Seg is where the inmates are isolated from the general population for various reasons. Seg inmates receive no visitors, nor can they come out. We were able to encourage and pray with them. Since they could not come out of their cells, we had to kneel down to speak through a 4x10 inch slot in their door. All we could see through the iron rectangle was a portion of their face. The image was burned in my mind. It was like a framed picture. I held back my tears as my spirit-man was crying out, “This is not the way it’s supposed to be!”



We were discussing “desires” and we were all openly sharing times when we’ve pursued illegitimate desires. We could all relate...it was too funny...we had to laugh at ourselves.



Our fellowship (FMF) just finished and we had just closed in prayer – we had such a wonderful time in the Word – it was a real “Kodak” moment!



All the men were either deployed, on duty, or training. So Sandy and I were left with only women at a “men’s fellowship.” If I recall correctly, we did discuss men, husbands, relationships, and even possibly changing the name of FMF to something more inclusive of females.
