

# LESSON 6

## STRENGTH



## Strength

I was recently at the gym with my son Daniel. It was a Sunday evening and I had just finished a weekend retreat for men, and I was exhausted. We lifted for a while and Daniel indicated that he wanted to go and play basketball on the courts there. I told him to go ahead, I was going to the sauna to relax. As I entered the small sauna, I entered a room jam packed with shoulder-to-shoulder sweating men. I grunted, pointed toward a thin spot between two large men, ducked my head, and moved forward, refusing to be denied a seat. They both quickly moved aside and let me sit down. I relaxed, closed my eyes, and took in the heat and steamy air.

After a few minutes, a young man entered the sauna carrying two dumbbells. He was tatted up, had huge muscled arms, designs shaved in his head, and a crazy look in his eyes. I glanced up once, but quickly closed my eyes again. The young man, about 25, didn't sit down like everyone else, but stood in the middle of the small room facing us all on the benches.....very awkward.

He began curling the two dumbbells and telling stories as though someone had asked, "What'd *you* do this weekend?" But the funny thing was, no one had said anything. He began to tell of his bravado and physical prowess and how he had unmercifully beat a guy who dared to challenge him. Every other word out of his mouth was an expletive. I mean really foul language. When he finished one story of a fight, he began another. Each story portrayed himself victorious over an opponent.

After a few minutes, one, then two guys got up and left the sauna. It was getting increasingly tense.

The young man continued to curl the dumbbells. As the heat of the sauna and the effort of the exercise peaked, this guy began to sweat profusely and swear more. He seemed to be working himself into some sort of angry frenzy. This time he was facing me, and each curl slung his sweat right into my face. It's like the sweat had singled me out.

Suddenly I heard something in my heart say, "Are you going to sit here quietly, or are you going to say something?"

I thought for a moment and then answered that familiar voice in my heart. "Yes Lord, I'm going to say something..."

After a few seconds gathering my thoughts, I sat up, opened my eyes, and looked into his. Then with a voice that caused everyone to turn toward me I said..."You know what your problem is?"

Another guy eased up off the bench and left the sauna.

The young man looked at me with a sinister look and said, "No, what's that?"

I took a moment and said, "You are a warrior and you were made to be strong.....but you don't have a battle to fight."

He looked around at everyone in the sauna and began curling the weights again, this time a little slower. After a few minutes of awkward silence, he started up again and began telling other stories. He would look up at me, from time-to-time trying to figure out what my comment really meant. Then, after a few more minutes of prayer to myself, I *really* moved in. "Tell me about your Dad." This is the quickest way for me to get to the heart of a man. It reveals such a place of deep emotion for all men, especially those who are wounded by the absence of a father.

He looked at me and began to unravel a story about his childhood in Bosnia, his father abandoning him and his brother; war, civil war, killing in the streets and unbelievable pain. I began to feel the father heart of God aching for this wounded young man.

It was then that I noticed he was wearing an ankle monitor. He told me that he had been out of jail for a month, that he had been a severe alcoholic, and that he was celebrating his first two weeks of being sober. I told him something that a father had probably never told him. "I'm proud of you..."

His voice and demeanor began to soften and I began to feel a love for this wounded young man. He shared how his greatest struggle had been his inability to find work. I told him that I would pray for him. He thanked me as though he thought it was an empty gesture, but I meant that I was going to pray for him...*right now*. I stood, reached out, and bowed my head while saying, "Father in the name of Jesus, I pray for this young man, this warrior. I ask that you would reveal your love; your great plan for his life, and give him a great job. I thank you that you hear me Father, In

Jesus name. Amen.”

He thanked me, mentioned that he had to be going, and left the room.

One of the men sitting on the adjacent bench from me said, “Man, I can’t believe that just happened. I can’t believe you just prayed for that guy, *and he let you!*” He indicated that he too was a Christian and commended me for loving that guy and praying for him. We talked for another five minutes or so, until we were interrupted by the young man as he opened the door and came back into the sauna.

He looked at me and said, “Hey, I just want to tell you something. I never have let someone pray for me and I don’t really do religious stuff...but when you prayed for me, I mean, when I went back outside, I could *feel* my heart jumping. I just want to thank you.”

I told him simply, “That’s Jesus...” He left with a smile on his face.

I still see Demeara from time to time at the gym and he always smiles at me and gives me a hug, telling me about the things that are going on in his life.

I always try to point him to Jesus’ teachings and remind him...”You are a warrior, you were made to be strong.”

