

“The Warrior—The Passionate Warrior”

Today is Valentine’s Day and we’re wrapping up this Warrior series by talking about the passionate warrior. If you were with us from the beginning, we discovered that every warrior, every man, is created with a cause to fight for. You can feel it. You, sense that God created you to conquer, to move forward, to overcome. You come alive when you realize you are fighting for something beyond yourself. Exodus 15:3 says, **“The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name” (Exodus 15:3)**. You were created in his image, men, and it’s time for you to reclaim that warrior part of you. It’s time to do like Jesus and balance true compassion, with a true sense of when it’s time to fight.

Oh, and I’ve got to say this. I had a couple of women confront me last week saying, “Aaron, all this warrior talk for men. I feel like you’re talking to me, too. I’m a warrior too. Is that OK?” Absolutely! Women, you are warriors too! This is for you too! But just like men don’t need to become more feminine, you women can be warriors and not become masculine. In many ways men AND women are all called to be warriors. Own this.

But, today is all about passion. And I know this is Valentine’s day and you probably want some pointers from a great lover like me about romantic passion, or sexual passion, but we’ll reserve that for another time. Although I have to say, that the kind of passion we’re going to talk about, if you live it out, will definitely ignite more romantic and sexual passion. But that’s more of a by-product.

For today I would define passion as **“Passion-- Feeling alive, having a focus that gets your heart pounding, your blood pumping, finding your true self, your true strength.”** A passion that makes you want to embrace life, but at the same time makes you ready to die. Not throw your life away, mind you, but to truly live, you have to face your own mortality. In other words, if living is just about death avoidance, it’s not really living. There’s no passion in that. And the most dangerous man on earth (and I mean dangerous in a positive way) is the man who has reckoned with his own death. Because then he can live for somebody besides himself. Jesus has tried to teach us this, he said, **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:35-36, NIV)**.

Too many of us men are walking around without a soul. We forfeited it. We exchanged it for comfort. We traded our souls for safety, for risk-avoidance. We bargained our souls away for predictability. We decided to live for ourselves and when all you do is live for yourself you lose yourself. Jesus was inviting us to be warriors for him and his cause, or all you’ll be is a mercenary fighting for you own benefit, living a life devoted to yourself. You do that, Jesus is saying, you think you’re gaining everything, it’s an illusion. You’re actually losing everything. We’ve gained the world and in the process we have lost our passion. And a man without passion is just a shell of a man.

Men, God created you to be a warrior of great passion, of causes beyond yourself, but there are things you need to know about, to name, that are out to rob you of your passion, and rob you of your power. There are enemies out there. If we can name these things, we begin to have power over them.

One of the enemies of passion, of warriors, is **what scripture calls the flesh, or the sinful nature**, or the old man (in contrast to the new man). The flesh is that part of us that wants to take the easiest way out of any situation. That part of us that keeps us from speaking up unless we know that people will agree with us. That part of us that doesn’t want to make a move unless we know that we’re going to succeed. The enemy called the flesh always wants to take the easy way out.

It’s easier to clean the garage, cut the grass, work on the car than it is to talk to your teenage daughter. It’s easier to go to the driving range and attack a bucket of balls than it is to face the people at work who are angry at you. It’s much easier to use porn and pleasure yourself than to make love to your wife, especially if things are tense between you and initiating sex with her feels risky.

In *Wild at Heart* Eldredge says, “Your flesh is a weasel, a poser, and a selfish pig.” But listen carefully, listen very carefully: Your flesh is *not you*. Your flesh is not you! In Romans 7 Paul talks about his struggle

with sin. He says, **“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...It is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me” (Romans 7:15-17, NIV).**

Paul's making a very important distinction here. He's saying, "I know that I struggle with sin, but my sin is not me! That's not my true heart!" Listen, men, women, children, you are not your sin. If you've chosen to follow Jesus, your sin is no longer the truest thing about you. Your heart is good. God said, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (Ezekiel 36:26). You are a new creation in Christ, a son of God, a daughter of God. Yes, you're still going to battle sin and temptation, but that's not you. If all you believe is that you're just a sinner, you will never really know your true heart.

The flesh is a false self that gets lived out in you becoming a comfort junkie, living in fear, living in self-preservation mode all the time. The flesh is a traitor in your house and it time for you to strike him down. So every time you see this traitor who wants to take the path of least resistance, you strike him down. You walk right into those situations that you'd normally run from. Speak up about those issues that you'd normally clam up about. Stop sabotaging your strength.

Somebody makes you a promise and they back out and you're angry. You don't have to stuff those feelings. If you do, they turn into fear. Now, don't lash out, out of control, that's not right either. But to constantly stuff your anger is going to eat you alive and steal your passion. You sabotage yourself.

Sabotage happens when you give your sell your strength to the highest bidder. You take a bribe, you accept flattery in exchange for some sort of loyalty, you refuse to confront an issue because keeping quiet will keep your promotion in the pipe, or your job secure. It's the flesh working against you. Name it. Name it and then do something about it.

When you start to live out of your strength you'll find that it grows every time. About 4 years ago I bought Janet a car—which is an ordeal in and of its self. I had negotiated a deal with the salesman and part of the deal was that they would put a spoiler on the car at no charge. But when it came time to finalize everything, they'd charged me for it. Added it on to the price we'd negotiated. My false self wanted to take the path of least resistance. "Just let it slide. Don't make any waves. It's only \$250. You've been in here for 2 hours, get this done." But not this time. I said, "Wait. That's supposed to be a part of the deal." He said, "No, that's an add on." I paused, cocked my head to side a bit, pushed my chair back and said, "No, it's a part of the deal or there is no deal." And I meant it—I was ready to walk.

Some of you might think that's a silly example, but listen, that's where you discover your strength, in the daily stuff of life. You taste your true strength and you'll want more. Men, it is imperative that you allow your true self to show up. And yes, if you allow your strength to show up, it's a little unsettling. More than a little. You might even be afraid that you'll do something bad if you let it show up. But the opposite is actually true. You'll do something bad if you don't. Let people feel the weight of who you really are and let them deal with it.

So there's this enemy of passion called the flesh. The Bible names another enemy of your passion, your true self. **It's called the world.** Some Christians say that when the Bible talks about the world that it's a prohibition against drinking, dancing, smoking, movies, playing cards, etc. No, it is not. "The world" is not a set of behaviors. The world is a collection of counterfeits—counterfeit battles, counterfeit adventures. Think about it. Why is it that a lot of people who battled to get to the top of their field get there and they are overwhelmed with emptiness and fear and self-hatred? There's nothing about their lives that's bigger than their lives.

Counterfeit adventures—no matter how much money you spend, or how far you go, it never really satisfies for long.

The world tries to sell a man a false sense of security and power. So, men, be brutally honest. Where does your sense of power come from? Is it how pretty your wife is? Your knowledge? Your expertise? Your degree? Your ability to do something others can't? What would you think of yourself if tomorrow you lost it all?

Jesus taught us to combat the enemy of the world, the collection of counterfeits, with real humility. He said, **"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor...But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:8, 10-11, NIV).**

Jesus was telling us to choose the path of humility. When you walk into a dinner party, take a backseat. Don't be a self-promoter, a glad-hander, a poser. Climb down the ladder. Have the mail clerk over for dinner; treat the custodian like he's more important than you; look to be the servant of all.

If you want to know what the world really feels about you, not that you should care too much about that, but if you want to know, just live out of your true strength. Say what you think, stand up for the underdog, challenge foolish policies. See how they react. The world of posers is shaken by a real man.

Now, I'm not telling us to be foolish, or reckless, or stupid. That's why we have to stay connected to Jesus so we don't become that, so that we can be wise. But in being connected to Jesus we start to live out our strength. Many of us have actually been afraid to let our strength show up because the world doesn't have a place for it. So what. The world is messed up. Let people feel the weight of who you are and let them deal with it.

One last enemy of passion, of strength, of purpose. I'm going to call this **the Devil**. Or the Saboteur. I don't talk a lot about the devil. Some people tell me I should preach more about the devil. I don't think so. He's defeated. He's got limited power over us. We need to be more focused on following Jesus, staying near to Jesus, than running from the devil. That's why I don't talk about him much. But you need to know that he's up to no good. And it doesn't take much to open the door a crack and he starts to push his way in. Has it ever crossed your mind that not every thought that crosses your mind comes from you? We're being lied to constantly, but rarely do we stop and say, "Wait a minute...who else is speaking here? Where are these ideas coming from?"

I've fought depression off and on my whole adult life. And the most recent bout I had, had a distinctive inner voice. A voice masquerading as the truth. A voice that was telling me in lots of different ways, "Aaron, you know how much of a disappointment you are, don't you? You are such a disappointment to people at church, to your parents. You're such a disappointment to your wife, to your kids? You are such a disappointment to your friends and coworkers. You could do so much better. You're a walking disappointment."

I call that the voice of the saboteur. And the only way to put the devil in his place is by listening to the truth. The voice of the One who says, "You are my friend, I love you for who you are, not what you do, or don't do, or fail to do. You are good. You have a new heart. You are a powerful warrior, forgiven, loved, and free. You are dangerous in all the right ways and I will protect you. Listen to my voice."

Listen to the truth. And to make sure you know the difference, find your band of brothers. People on a similar journey. Men who will help you discern what you're hearing. Find that group. Create that group. Just do it.

And of course, protect yourself. What's a warrior without armor? Paul talked about the full armor of God. Paul wrote, "**Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**" (Ephesians 6:13-17, NIV).

God's given you armor and it's important that you put it on every day. Here's your challenge, warriors. Take that passage of scripture, and make a prayer out of it. "Lord I put on the **belt of truth**. I choose a lifestyle of integrity and honesty. Tune me in to truth about the situations around me and the truth about myself. Help me to see the lies around me. And equip me with the **breastplate of righteousness**. Guide me in choosing purity and holiness—defend my heart against assaults. And fit me with the **gospel of peace** so that I see the big picture of my life in your life. Help me to live out the gospel story in the face of the soap operas that pose as real life. And Lord I carry with me the **shield of faith**. I trust in you to protect. I trust that are with me, no matter what. And I choose to wear the **helmet of salvation**. I receive that gift of salvation new everyday from you, and nothing can separate me from you. And I am armed with the **sword of the Holy Spirit**. I'm not just on defense. I'm on offense. I will combat evil, and injustice, and poverty and hopelessness every time I see it, and I will choose to see it."

If you want to have and maintain true passion, true strength, your true self, armor up. Every day, armor up. The devil is defeated, but he's still out there prowling around. Protect your strength, protect your passion.

Passion. Men, God has created you with the heart of a warrior, an explorer, a builder, a caretaker and defender of creation. He's given you an open door, a character, a heart. And if you haven't seized those yet, they're still there. That's your passion.

Let me put this way, as a question: If you had permission to do what you really wanted to do, what would you do? Don't ask how, that will stop things cold. Leave the how up to God. How is God's department. God is asking you what? What is written on your heart? What makes you come alive? If you could do what you've always wanted to do, what would that be? Don't ask what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive because what the world needs are men who have come alive.

And I have a hunch that for lots of us men we need to get away from the noise and distraction of daily life, get away with your own soul, get away into the wilderness, get away for a least a few hours of solitude and silence and allow things to wake up.

Eldredge says that in those moments, be ready, because things will start to surface. And one of those things might be grief, especially if you feel like there is so much time lost. But push on, because under the grief is a desire. If temptation starts to surface go deep with it. Ask yourself, "What is the real desire beneath this desire?" Get away, get into the wilderness as soon as possible, at least for a few hours, you can do that, and find your passion, your true strength, your inner warrior. And then get ready. You will be different.

Erwin McManus tells about one summer when his son, Aaron, when to summer camp. He writes, "He was just a little guy, and I was kind of glad because it was a church camp. I figured he wasn't going to hear all those ghost stories, because ghost stories can really cause a kid to have nightmares. But unfortunately, since it was a Christian camp and they didn't tell ghost stories, because we don't believe in ghosts, they told demon and Satan stories instead. And so when Aaron got home, he was terrified.

"Dad, don't turn off the light!" he said before going to bed. 'No, Daddy, could you stay here with me? Daddy, I'm afraid. They told all these stories about demons.'

"And I wanted to say, 'They're not real.'

"He goes, 'Daddy, Daddy, would you pray for me that I would be safe?' I could feel it. I could feel warm-blanket Christianity beginning to wrap around him, a life of safety, safety, safety.

"I said, 'Aaron, I will not pray for you to be safe. I will pray that God will make you dangerous, so dangerous that demons will flee when you enter the room.'

"And he goes, 'All right. But pray I would be really, really dangerous, Daddy.'

Men, women, warriors. I pray that you come to that place in your own life where you stop asking God to give you a safe life, and make you a dangerous follower of Jesus Christ. Let's be dangerous! Let's be dangerous to poverty, to addiction, to AIDS, to racism, to hypocrisy. Let's be dangerous to judgmentalism, to purposelessness. Let's be dangerous to unrestrained materialism and any practice that would prey upon the weakness of another. Let's be the warriors we were created to be. Warriors with a cause to fight for. Wounded warriors who know how to heal by being connected to Christ. Passionate warriors who are strong and know it. Don't be afraid of your strength. Men, you are a warrior. 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 in his book Wild at Heart. It's a dangerous book. Read it!