

He Is Mighty who Conquers Himself

"Twenty-two! Twenty-three! Twenty-four! Arrrghhh!" Charlie's arms gave out, and he collapsed face first on the mat. Press-ups were hard!

"Keep going, Charlie!" shouted Alan.

"Whoa, Charlie!" Mr Jackson, the PE teacher, strolled over. "Take it easy."

"Twenty-seven—I want to get strong!" Charlie panted. "I want to be like that forward on TV last night. Did you see him?" Charlie fell on to his chest.

Mr Jackson chuckled. "Well, Charlie, it took him time to get that way—he didn't do it all at once. In fact, it's important not to over-exercise, because that



causes tiny tears in the muscle fibres. Then the tears fill with fluid and you become swollen and sore."

"What about 'no pain, no gain', though?" asked Charlie cheekily.

"Yes, well, to a certain extent, tearing and repairing is part of the muscle-building process," replied Mr Jackson. "But it's important not to overdo it."

"But I want results fast!"

"Charlie, you can't make it happen all at once. The body simply doesn't work that way." He paused before continuing. "There's a wise old Chinese saying," he added, grinning, "'He is mighty who conquers himself'. Now, Charlie, if you can do that, you'll really be strong!"

Mr Jackson walked to the middle of the gym and, blowing his whistle, called that it was time to start getting out the equipment. Charlie followed him.

"How do you conquer yourself, Mr Jackson?" he asked.

"By not always giving in to yourself when you want something," Mr Jackson replied slowly. "We say no to other people sometimes, don't we? Well, we have to learn to know when to say no to ourselves, too."

"You mean like saying no to drugs and stuff?"

"That's part of it, yes. But there are other things, too. Like not going along with it when other people mock your friends or family," Mr Jackson responded to Charlie's look of enquiry.

Charlie looked thoughtful—he could see how difficult that might be. "What else?" he asked.

"Well, for instance, I like my job and I like you all, but some days I'd rather stay at home and relax. On those days, I have to push myself. I have to because it's my

There is a wise old Oriental saying: 'He is mighty who conquers himself.' If you can do that, then you're really strong.

I'm sure there are lots of days you don't want to come to school either. It takes strength of will to do what you don't always want to do.

obligation. I'm sure there are days when you don't want to come to school either. It takes strength of will to do what you don't want to do."

"My parents make me go to school," Charlie said. "It's not my choice, it's theirs."

Mr Jackson laughed. "Yes—when you're young, your parents have to choose for you until you learn to do it on your own."

That afternoon Charlie had a chance to conquer himself. They were playing football. He was in the Red team with some pretty decent players, although the Blue team had good people, too. Charlie was dribbling and passing well—his hours of practice were paying off, he thought with satisfaction. Even so, the score was drawn at two all. Then, unexpectedly, Charlie was able to make the decisive pass. In extra time, he found a way through the Blues' defence—and scored! The Reds erupted.

Back in the changing room, Malik, one of the Blue team, scowled at Charlie and started teasing him about his job at the grocer's shop.

"Bag boy's improving his aim. Must be good practice, making sure people's groceries get to the bag!"

Some of the others began to titter. Charlie got annoyed. He pushed Malik angrily into a locker. Malik was just about to punch Charlie back when Mr Jackson strode in.

"Hey—break it up, boys," he ordered. "Now, what's going on here, Charlie? See me in the gym at once!"

"Now what was that all about?" asked Mr Jackson, shutting the gym door behind him.

"Malik teases me all the time about my job—he's always on about it," Charlie said angrily. "I've tried to put up with it, but now I'm sick of it. I've had enough!"

"Well, Charlie, you wanted to know what real strength was," Mr Jackson said calmly, "and here's a good example. You've got to learn not to strike back, not to retaliate, even when others are being mean. That needs great strength."

"I can't do that," Charlie protested. "It's not natural. If someone hits me, I hit them back. Only a wimp would be nice to someone who's mean to him. That's not strength, that's weakness!"

"But that's not right, is it? Just think, Charlie. How much strength would it have taken not to push Malik?"

Charlie thought for a moment. "Well, more than I've got," he said.

"Well, maybe it's time to start exercising a different kind of muscle, then!" said Mr Jackson.

"Are you going to punish me, Sir?" asked Charlie.

"Well, in the sense that you'll have to accept the consequences of your actions, yes. And it will be the same for Malik. But I'm going to tell you a story first. This story shows true strength of character, true self-discipline.

"One night Mrs Martin Luther King was sitting in her living room in Alabama with their baby. Her husband was out spreading the message that black people should be treated with the same respect as white. Of course, some white people didn't like this. Mrs King was just taking the baby into the bedroom when dynamite went off in the front porch. The whole sitting-room blew up.

"Crowds of black people gathered around the house. They wanted to retaliate against the whites for doing such a terrible thing. But do you know what Dr King did? He asked them to do nothing. He said, "Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that." And sure enough, little by little, Alabama changed, and eventually the whole United States changed, and the whole world changed a little bit for the better because Dr King refused to strike back. That's real strength—in fact, so much strength it changed history."

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Martin Luther King

Charlie looked thoughtfully in front of him. He was impressed. "I don't think I can be like that, Mr Jackson," he said eventually.

"I can't always be like that either," replied Mr Jackson. "But I try. And the more I try, the more I strengthen those muscles." He paused. "Now, Charlie," he said. "I want you to find Malik and apologise to him. That's your punishment."

Phew! thought Charlie—he'd got off lightly. But, as the afternoon progressed, he began to think what a tough assignment this was. His eyes narrowed resentfully as he glanced periodically at Malik.

After lessons, Charlie approached Malik reluctantly. He felt sick at the thought of apologising and admitting fault—what a wimp Malik would think him! Especially when Malik had asked for it with all his teasing.

Charlie braced himself. "Malik, I was wrong to push you. I'm sorry. I should have had more self-control."

Charlie cringed. But, to his surprise, Malik didn't sneer. Instead, he said, "Well, I was teasing you a lot. I'm sorry too."

Charlie and Malik eyed each other. Then Charlie held out his hand.

"Shake?" he asked.

"Shake," Malik agreed.

Next day at break, Charlie heard some of Malik's friends saying, "There's the bag boy again!" He felt his hackles rising, but he bit his lip and managed to turn and walk off.

He heard Malik behind him. "Don't say that," he was saying. "Bagging those groceries must be doing something for him. He's really very strong!"

"Charlie? Strong?"

"Yeah," replied Malik. "And he's not a bad striker, either!"

"Hi, Malik," Charlie called out.

He felt his whole world brighten up—all because he'd said sorry!

