

Stretching Ourselves... Into our World

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Beginning thoughts...

Reaching items on the top shelves of my cabinets has never been a problem. The highest closet shelf isn't a bother. My long arms are a blessing for bringing things into my hands. However, not everyone has the advantage of height. Some much stretch to reach things toward the back or resort to step stools and ladders to obtain objects. Nearly everything we do involves some type of stretching, bending or reaching. As we grow older, these become less and less easy. Our ability to extend ourselves becomes difficult, if not impossible.

What about our motivation? Will we leave those needed items in cabinets or on shelves we can't reach? We'll probably adapt and create a plan for placing them within our reach. People can get quite creative with storage. Yet, are we creative in reaching others for Christ? Do we limit ourselves to the local church? This month's study challenges us to stretch our vision, mindset, prayer and giving. Start by seeing farther than your church. How can you help in your community? Change your mindset about supporting missions. What would Jesus do? Develop a disciplined prayer life and pray for missionaries. Lastly, give generously and cheerfully to support God's work. Put these items within your reach.

If you're truly stretching, you're probably feeling the pain. Keep going. Strength and stamina will equip you for the long haul. Now, ready...set...one, two, reach; one, two, reach. Keep on until you've reached heights of joy, peace, and comfort knowing that you are doing all you can for the kingdom of God.



Stretching

OUR VISION

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Stretch our vision as we seek to find and fulfill our role in the Great Commission.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).*

- 🌐 Write the Core Development verse on a 3x5 card and try to memorize it this week.
- 🌐 Go over all questions and answers in *Treasure*, p. 23, including Scriptures for Warmup and Strength Training.
- 🌐 Do you have 20/20 vision? *(Probably not many, but maybe a few.)*
- 🌐 How many of you wear contacts or glasses? What do they do for you? *(Enable you to see better; correct your vision.)*
- 🌐 What will help our vision for a lost world? *(Understanding that God meant the Great Commission for all of us—Matthew 28:19-20)*
- 🌐 How can we improve our spiritual vision? *(1) Look Christward—John 3:14-15; (2) Look Heavenward—Acts 7:55; (3) Pray God would open eyes—2 Kings 6:17.)*
- 🌐 What condition occurs when there's no physical vision? *(Blindness)*
- 🌐 What if there's no spiritual vision? *(It's as if we don't have eyes—Isaiah 59:10)*
- 🌐 What will happen to spiritual blind people? *(1) They perish—Proverbs 29:18; (2) They're in darkness—Matthew 6:23; (3) They can't comprehend the light—John 1:5; (4) They're alienated from God—Ephesians 4:18.)*
- 🌐 Do we have heavenly vision? *(1 Corinthians 13:12; Ezekiel 1:1; Isaiah 33:17; Revelation 21:1-4)*
- 🌐 Does this vision include missionaries and their works?
- 🌐 Does your church maintain a missions emphasis? If not, begin now. Choose a world region and a missionary to support.
- 🌐 Read “Stretching Around The World, Pre Easter Week Of Prayer Presentation” (pp. 66-67, WNAC Program and Plan Book.)

COOL DOWN: Pray for workers in creative access regions. Ask God to stretch your vision.



Stretching

OUR MINDSET

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Stretch our mindset, placing highest priority on eternal matters.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matthew 6:33).

- 🌐 Write the Core Development verse on a 3x5 card and memorize it this week.
- 🌐 Go over all the questions and answers in *Treasure*, p. 25.
- 🌐 In what ways could you stretch toward eternal matters? (1) *Study*—2 Timothy 2:15; (2) *Work*—1 Corinthians 15:58; (3) *Serve*—Ephesians 6:7; (4) *Give*—Deuteronomy 16:17.
- 🌐 You may already be stretching in these areas. If so, in what other areas could you improve?
- 🌐 Read Matthew 6:25. Think of people you know who are never content with what they own. What do they constantly worry about? (*Changing things, shopping, looking for something else, not having enough money to get what they want, etc.*)
- 🌐 Who was speaking in this verse? (*Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount*)
- 🌐 What was His point? (*Be more concerned with spiritual matters than worldly cares—Matthew 6:33.*)
- 🌐 Is it wrong to shop? (*No. Just don't continually dwell on shopping. It shouldn't be a 24/7 activity in life.*)
- 🌐 Why is it so important to walk as a Christian? (*It's our duty to walk wisely, to make the most of our time, and to do God's Will—Colossians 2:6-7, 4:5; Ephesians 5:15-17.*)
- 🌐 How can you impact world evangelism? (*Start at home—make sure family members are saved; Work—witness to co-workers; Church outreach—invite others to church; Give—Help support missionary efforts.*)
- 🌐 Does your church promote the World Mission Offering? (*If so, give generously; if not, talk to your pastor about supporting it this year.*)

COOL DOWN: Close in prayer, asking God to help you focus on things that are really important and will make a difference for eternity.



Stretching OUR PRAYERS

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Stretch our prayer habits by praying more consistently and specifically for missionaries and global missions efforts.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).*

- 🌐 Write the Core Development verse on a 3x5 card. Review the first two Core Development verses.
- 🌐 Go over the questions and answers in *Treasure*, p. 27. Look at the Scriptures Paul asks believers to pray: **NOTE:** *1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 should be 2 Thessalonians and Colossians 3:3-4 should be 4:3-4.*
- 🌐 Do you get excited when you hear missionaries tell about their work?
- 🌐 Do you ever want to be a part of that work?
- 🌐 You can (1) PRAY, (2) GIVE (See "Muscle Toning", p. 27.); (3) ENCOURAGE (Send cards, email o, phone; (4) INVITE (Invite missionaries into your home.)
- 🌐 Why should prayer be part of the Christian walk? (1) *It's direct communication with God—Psalm 91:15;* (2) *It shows faith—Mark 11:24, 1 John 5:14;* (3) *It's a condition of righteousness—James 5:16;* (4) *It indicates obedience—1 John 3:22;* (5) *So as to not enter into temptation—Matthew 26:41.)*
- 🌐 Can you think of some notable prayers recorded in the Bible? (*Abraham's in Genesis 18:23,32-33; David's in 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Jacob's in Genesis 32:24-30; Christ's in John 17, Luke 23:34.)*
- 🌐 Are prayers always answered in the ways we ask? (*No, they can be refused: Paul prayed his thorn be removed—2 Corinthians 12:8; Moses prayed to go see the land beyond Jordan—Deuteronomy-3:25-26; David asked for his child to live—2 Samuel 12:16, 22-23.)*
- 🌐 How does God perceive saints' prayers? (*As precious—Revelation 5:8*)
- 🌐 So then, do you believe He wants you to pray for missionaries and their work? (Yes)

COOL DOWN: Dismiss with suggestions mentioned in the study.



Stretching

OUR GIVING

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Stretch our giving by examining spending and exploring creative ways to give.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

- 🌐 Write the Core Development verse on a 3x5 card. After you write the verse, circle these words: **give; God; loveth; cheerful**. I hope you've stretched your memorization skills this month.
- 🌐 Go over the questions and answers in *Treasure*, p. 29.
- 🌐 Why is giving and money a sensitive issue with most people? *(There's no set answer. Discuss and share ideas.)*
- 🌐 What is a tithe? (It refers to a tenth or 10% —Genesis 28:22.)
- 🌐 Tithing is commanded. *(Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:28; Nehemiah 12:44, 13:12; 2 Chronicles 31:4-60)*
- 🌐 Is tithing mentioned in the New Testament? *(Matthew 23:23; Luke 18:12)*
- 🌐 Malachi 3:10 mentions the *storehouse*. What is that? *(the local church)*
- 🌐 What did God tell us He would do when we tithe? *(Pour out more blessings than we can receive.)*
- 🌐 What are we doing if we don't tithe? *(Robbing God—Malachi 3:8)*
- 🌐 Remember what happened to Ananias and Sapphira? *(They died because they robbed God—Acts 5:1-2, 5, 10.)*
- 🌐 Are we to only give to the church? *(No, other references speak of giving: (1) to the poor—Proverbs 21:13; (2) to those who ask—Matthew 5:42; (3) to our enemies—Romans 12:20.)*
- 🌐 Does God expect everyone to give the same amount? (No, we each should give proportionately based on what we have, and according to our ability—2 Corinthians 8:12; Acts 11:29; Ezra 2:69.)

COOL DOWN: Pray the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4) together, then ask God for grace to trust Him for daily needs.

In closing...

Stretching is *not* fun. It's out of our comfort zone. We feel like we're out of control when things get stretched. However, when the stretching is completed we feel more energized, ready for the actual activity, ready to leap tall buildings, conquer the world... (Well, maybe not quite that energized.) But you get the point. Stretching helps our bodies become more physically fit. Stretching spiritually equips us for service to God. That's the place I want to be. If it takes getting out of my comfort zone and stretching to new heights, then that is what I intend to do. Writing these facilitator's guides has been a stretch for me. Yet, the blessings have been so great, that it's worth the effort. Stretching can make us sore, tired, and out of breath, but in the long run, we gain much more than we lose. Try it, my friends. Get out of that comfortable place you enjoy and seek to increase your efforts for reaching the world for Christ. You'll be glad you did.

—Carolyn