



reaching our communities

study by Dana Copeland ✧ guide by Carolyn Michael

Churches in my state participate in an annual Free Will Baptist Mission Conference. Although I delight to hear different missionaries present their needs, successes and messages from varied fields of service, the challenge comes in knowing whom the Lord would have me support.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if each of us had funds to support every missionary? However, since that's not possible, we can pray God would instruct us where to direct our money. When everyone helps, more people can be reached.

It's the same with communities and neighborhoods. Often this area is far beyond one person's reach. Yet, when we, as a church, work together in outreach, we can cover a much broader span. So often, we sit in our comfortable homes and don't even think of others around us in need. We tend to get into isolation mode from everyone except our immediate family. I'm as guilty as anyone. With so much going on in our own lives, we may think we just can't handle anyone else's problems. That may be true for a while, but God still expects us to help our neighbors.

These neighbors may be next door, around the corner, in another state or halfway around the world. Our lives intertwine with hundreds of people without us even realizing. Stop for a minute and pray for the first person who pops in your mind. Is there a way you can reach out to this person?











This month's study is a great reminder that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We wouldn't want to hurt someone we love. Think about it. Stretch your horizons this month by reaching out to someone in need. You will be blessed if you do.

Quite a Stretch

BARRIERS TO GROWTH

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Examine yourself and evaluate motives and methods in your church to determine barriers to church growth.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:46-47).*

-  Read the Body Fitness goal and the Core Development verse to start study.
-  Go over the questions and answers on p. 13, *Treasure*.
-  By definition, what is a barrier? (*In this context: a boundary or limit.*)
-  Have you ever driven around a barrier put up for flooded areas, road construction or icy, snow covered roads? Is that smart?
-  Aren't these barriers important?
-  So what about the barriers to church growth? (*These barriers are important, also. We have to recognize them and know what they are to be able to do anything about them.*)
-  Identify some barriers to the growth of your church. (*SUGGESTIONS: size of the community, lack of money, work schedules of members, apathy, elderly members, ritualistic programs, programs are "too liberal", not enough children, etc. Churches in urban and rural settings areas may have different reasons for non-growth.*)
-  Why do we need growth in our churches? (*As a witness—Matthew 24:14; Everyone needs to hear—Mark 16:15; To turn people from darkness to light—Acts 26:18; His kingdom shall have no end—Isaiah 9:7; To remember the Lord—Psalm 22:27.*)
-  On the other hand, is your church a growing church? If so, share why you think that is so.)
-  How do we handle or eliminate barriers to church growth? (*Brainstorm some ideals that might work for your church. Speak with your pastor about them.*)


COOL DOWN: Dismiss with prayer concerning possible solutions for the questions posed.


Quite a Stretch


WHOM DO WE REACH?

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Stretch yourself by evaluating needs in your community and determining to love your neighbor.


CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Galatians 5:14).*


 Go over the questions and answers, p. 15, *Treasure*.


 Reread Galatians 5:14. In the NIV it reads, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

 How can we humanly do this? (*The answer is we can't. We must have the help of the Holy Spirit—Galatians 5:16-17, 22-25.*)


 Do you know your neighbors? Are you actually friends with them?


 How do you find time (with everything you do) to be a witness in your neighborhood?


 Why are we to bother with our neighbors? (*They have busy lives; we have busy lives; we'll just bother them. No, it's our responsibility. Read Luke 15:6-7. Anything that is lost needs finding.*)

 Thinking about Jesus and His zeal in winning souls, should we not have some of that zeal in our efforts? (*Isaiah 59:17; John 2:15-17, 4:34; Acts 10:38*)

 Do you feel that urgency about lost souls?

 Jesus truly felt the call of duty. Name some ways. (1) *He must be about His Father's business—Luke 2:49; (2) He must preach—Luke 4:43; (3) He must accomplish His work—Luke 12:50; (4) He must work while the day lasted—John 9:4; (5) He must go to Jerusalem to suffer—Matthew 16:21.*

 To reach the lost with the message that Christ can meet their spiritual needs, sometimes we must meet physical needs first. Name some of the examples mentioned in *Treasure*, p. 14, next-to-last paragraph. (*single mothers, recently divorced women, recovering drug addicts, food pantry, elderly, homeless, children*)

 Most communities have countless needs. If your church is too small to handle physical needs, seek to connect with other churches or agencies or help in their projects and efforts.













COOL DOWN: Pray for the people of your neighborhood or community and for ability to reach them.

Quite a Stretch

WHAT CAN I OFFER?

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Identify and utilize spiritual gifts and natural abilities for reaching out and serving neighbors and community.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body?" (1 Corinthians 12:18-19).*

-  Go over the questions and answers, p. 17, *Treasure*.
-  What does James 2:14-17 mean to you? Is it an action verse?
-  How does this verse relate to James 4:17?
-  Are we asking for forgiveness right now? *(I'm sure we've all been guilty of this for any number of reasons.)*
-  Will God forgive us? *(Yes—I John 1:9.)*
-  Do you know of people in your church or life who show compassion over and over to those around them?
-  Can you imagine Jesus treating anyone in need, with anything but compassion?
-  For people to see our faith, in what form must it be manifested? *(In actual deeds—Matthew 25:41-46.)*
-  Read Ephesians 4:24-29 for a practical look at life. How does faith come alive in this passage for a believer? *(1) By living as a Christian; (2) Laying aside things detrimental to you; (3) That the process of putting off and putting on is actually walking in the Spirit.*
-  Did you notice that verse 25 tells us to "speak every man truth with his neighbor"? *(Paul is telling us to reject lies and not speak falsehoods, but rather speak the truth for Christ's sake because He is truth.)*
-  Do you ever catch yourself wanting to *stretch* the truth with someone?
-  Is this ever a good thing to do? *(No.)*


COOL DOWN: Dismiss in prayer using Psalm 139:23-24.

Quite a Stretch


MEASURING SUCCESS


BODY FITNESS GOAL: View success and measure church growth not by numbers, but in souls, repentant hearts and greater church unity/involvement.


CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).*


 Go over all the questions and answers on p. 19, *Treasure*.


 Do you feel your church has met this week's Body Fitness Goal?


 Let's go a little further in recognizing measures of church growth. (1) *People gaining personal salvation—Ephesians 2:8-9;* (2) *Christian walk of members—James 2:18;* (3) *Witnesses—John 1:45;* (4) *Soul Winning—Matthew 4:19;* (5) *Faith—1 Thessalonians 1:3;* and (6) *Helping others—Matthew 25:35-36, 45.)*


 Should we ever evaluate a church's success based on numbers alone? (*Think of very small communities with thriving, active churches. Think of huge communities with large churches, even mega-churches. Do you think all members are living a Christian life, or could they be attending for status or some other reason? Not judging, just wondering.*)


 How do you measure success in your life? (*Wealth, material possessions, good health, few problems, spiritual blessings*)

 Are you a failure if you have financial problems, meager possessions, poor health, or many problems? (*No, not necessarily. The measure of success is different for everyone—as it is with churches.*)

 What are some things all churches should be striving to accomplish? (1) *Serve God faithfully—Ephesians 6:7-8; Matthew 24:45-47; Hebrews 12:28;* (2) *bear one another's burdens—Galatians 6:2;* (3) *do good to others—Galatians 6:10;* (4) *have the love of God in our hearts—Romans 5:5.)*

 Do you feel needed and wanted in your church? Do you try to make others feel that way?

 Is your church a *mission-minded church (Acts 1:8)*? Where is your Jerusalem? (*city, community*) Judaea? (*state, country*) Samaria? (*continent*) Uttermost part of the earth? (*outside your country*) Do you support missionaries who serve these areas?

 Is your church successful in reaching the lost?

COOL DOWN: Dismiss with the suggestions given. Ask God what He expects of you in reaching others for Him.

In Closing...

Stretching involves some effort. A necessary part of any exercise program or body building routine, stretching warms up and lengthens muscles to keep them from being too tight.

Being a good neighbor involves effort, also. If we are going to show those around us (or even elsewhere) that we love them, we have to actually do something. The word *love* is thrown around so loosely now, it's hard to know who truly loves us...That is, unless we see them stretching their boundaries to help us out. We live in a world of selfishness and individuality where everyone is concerned only with self. Wouldn't it be great if this study helps us think of someone we can help today and tomorrow....then someone the next day, and so on. That would be stretching for the glory of God. Community outreach happens one person at a time, but working together as a church, it grows into something big, with far-reaching effects. Wish I could give you all a big hug, neighbors.

—Carolyn