

Fitness Challenge: Stretch Your Body and Your Faith

Editor's Note: Susie Larson started a fitness challenge on her blog. Every week she has encouraged readers to do one activity to encourage physical and spiritual discipline.

****Always consult your physician before beginning any exercise program.***

Physical Discipline—Stretch Your Muscles

I'm telling you, friend, if you take a few moments every morning and every evening to stretch your major muscle groups, you'll feel a whole lot better and carry yourself taller! Here are some of the many benefits of stretching regularly:

- Alleviates most body aches
- Reduces stress
- Improves circulation
- Increases overall flexibility
- Reduces occurrence of injury

Dangers of *not* stretching:

- Higher level of muscle discomfort
- Greater potential for injury
- Decreased circulation
- Increased and recurrence of muscle/joint issues
- Absorb stress in a way that diminishes health

Remember to stretch gently in the morning since your muscles will be stiff and not warmed up.

When you roll out of bed in the morning, face your mirror, stand with your feet shoulder width apart and bend your knees slightly (sit back slightly in squat position; shift weight to your heels). Place your left hand on your left thigh, and

stretch your right hand in the air (pointing upward to 12 o'clock). With knees still bent, your left hand on your left thigh for support and your abs tight to support your lower back, gently stretch that arm overhead until you're pointing to 11 or 10 o'clock). Then repeat on the other side.

Lie on the floor, put your hands under your knees, and gently pull them toward your chest. If you're able, extend one leg in the air and stretch your hamstring; flex and point your toe to get that lower leg warmed up as well (and then repeat with the other leg).

Stand up and take a few deep breaths by breathing in through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.

Doing a few basic stretches like these will energize you and help you feel ready for your day! It's amazing what a difference a few moments of stretching will do for you. Repeat this routine again at night before you go to bed.

If you need more instruction when it comes to stretching, you'll find a number of instructional videos on YouTube.

Spiritual Discipline—Stretch Your Faith

Scripture says we cannot please God without faith. So this week, it's time to activate your faith in a more intentional way. Each day this week, ask the Lord to show you what He wants you to believe Him for. (Is it rest? Provision? Direction? A future promised land?) Then start thanking Him by faith for His promise to you. Find a Scripture to stand on, and start living like His promises are true.

Also make yourself available to Him each and every day. Ask Him to use you in ways that surprise you. Pay attention to that inner nudge, and move when He tells you to move. Buy a cup of coffee for someone in need. Write a letter. Open a door. Reach out to a stranger. Listen for the Lord's voice, and then do what He says. Your faith is precious and priceless

to Him.

Here's why stretching our faith is so important to us:

- It reminds us of who (and whose) we are.
- We grow in the things of God.
- We become spiritually conditioned to take the land God wants to give us.
- It reminds us that we're pilgrims on this earth, just passing through.
- It reminds us that greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.
- We bring pleasure to God's heart when we live by faith.

Scriptures for Faith Stretching

- "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him" (Heb. 11:6, NIV).
- "What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?" (James 2:14, NLT).
- "For we live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7, NIV).

Dangers of living an earthbound life:

- We lose our sense of expectancy.
- We lose sight of our invitation to walk intimately with God.
- We miss out on an exciting faith adventure.
- We're easily deceived by the enemy.
- We settle for far less than what God has for us.

*Adapted from **Susie Larson's** new book, Balance That Works When Life Doesn't: Simple Steps to a Woman's Physical & Spiritual Health. Susie is an author, speaker and radio host for KTIS in Minnesota and Focus on the Family. Visit her website at .*