

21 DAYS  
OF  
STRETCH

# 21 DAYS OF STRETCH

THE DEVOTIONAL



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## INTRODUCTION

**THIS DEVOTIONAL WAS WRITTEN BY ALIVE CITY CHURCH.**

**THE THEME OF THIS DEVOTIONAL IS 'STRETCH'.**

**2022 IS THE YEAR FOR GROWTH AND EXPANSION, AND WE USE THESE DEVOTIONALS IN OUR 2022 FASTING AND PRAYER TO LEAD US INTO PRAYER.**



## WHAT IS IT?

**21 DEVOTIONALS FOR 21 DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING.**

## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

- **SPEND A SHORT TIME PRAYING THAT GOD WILL SPEAK TO YOU BEFORE YOU START READING**
- **READ THE FOCUS SCRIPTURE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE DEVOTIONAL FIRST**
- **READ THE ACCOMPANIED REFLECTION OF THE FOCUS SCRIPTURE**
- **SPEND TIME REFLECTING ON WHAT THE DEVOTIONAL IS SAYING AND HOW IT CAN BE APPLIED SPECIFICALLY TO YOUR OWN LIFE**
- **COME BACK TO THE 'FURTHER STUDY' SCRIPTURES LATER IN THE DAY (LUNCHTIME AND EVENING BEFORE YOU BREAK) TO HELP YOU MEDITATE ON THE MESSAGE OF THE DAY. FEEL FREE TO SPLIT THE SCRIPTURES UP ACROSS THE DAY**
- **WRITE DOWN ANY IMPRESSIONS, ACTIONS AND NOTES THAT COME FROM YOUR STUDY**
- **PRAY ABOUT THE TOPIC OF THE DAY TO EQUIP YOU FOR THE STRETCH AHEAD IN 2022**

# WELCOME

# PREPARE FOR EXPANSION

***“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.” Isaiah 54:2-3 (NIV)***

This year, the theme for Alive City Church is growth and expansion. This is not just the theme for the church but for you and your family also. God wants to increase everything concerning you in 2022. Isaiah 54:2-3, is the main scripture for our fast. We are standing on God’s Word to expand our territory, our spheres of influence and to give us the nations. God wants to grow the church upwards and outwards so that we can impact the community and spread the gospel to the nation. He also wants to expand your business, grow your family and increase your wisdom.

However, when we look carefully at the scripture, there are instructions for us to take action. We must prepare ourselves appropriately for this type of growth and expansion. We cannot live the same way and act the same as we did at a certain capacity. If we want to experience expansion we must do the following: ‘enlarge’, ‘stretch’, ‘do not hold back’, ‘lengthen’ and ‘strengthen’. Preparation is key and the onus to prepare for what is coming is on us, not God.

This year we need to stretch ourselves out of our comfort zones. Growth and Expansion is not just a prayer request that goes up to heaven, but it comes with prior preparation on our part. Action is required from us if we want to see the church grow. We need to enlarge our capacity to serve and to give. We need to stretch ourselves in prayer and in fasting. Not holding back our gifts and talents, to lengthen and strengthen us so that we are ready for the outbreak and the overflow.

**Further Study:** Deuteronomy 28,  
Proverbs 24:27

# DAY 1

# DAY 2

# OMIT TO COMMIT

*"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established."*  
*Proverbs 16:3 (ESV)*

At this time of year, it's easy to go overboard with New Year's Resolutions, making many ambitious plans and no real method on how to get there. But in many things, there's a saying that rings true; 'Less is More'.

We tend to have a lot of aims and goals in life and by no means is that a bad thing - Proverbs 21:5 says "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance..." - but in our goal setting and ambitious pursuits, we should remember to prioritise God. The well known scripture, Matthew 6:33 captures the essence of this perfectly; "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." To 'omit' is to exclude or to leave out. Omitting food in order to commit to God during this fast is only the beginning.

As we journey together, let's commit to omit the things that are hindering us from committing our most treasured resources to God - our effort, our attention and our time.

*Let's omit fear* - less fear means more boldness to step out and do what the Lord has called us to do. We will see doors opening in all directions.

*Let's omit doubt* - less doubt means more faith, which is pleasing to God. We will see Him work wonders in our situation, our friends and families and the church.

*Let's omit distractions* - less distraction means more focus, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We will be able to lay aside every weight and run the race that is set before us!

You're waiting on God and trusting Him for something new this year. It may even be something you were waiting on since last year or beyond. But God is saying that He wants you to *really* prioritise Him now.

Seeking God's Kingdom and righteousness is like having a shopping bag. Trying to hold all of the added things will get really tricky if you haven't got your bag ready!

Omit the things that are getting in the way of you committing to making God top priority in your life, and watch how God blesses your 2022.

**Further Study:** Matthew 14:26-29, Hebrews 11:6-10, Hebrews 12:1-2

# DAY THREE

## PRAYER STAMINA

**"And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not stay awake and keep watch with Me for one hour?"  
Matthew 26:40 (AMP)**

Prayer is an area which many Christians struggle with. They find it difficult to connect with God in prayer. They are either easily distracted, not motivated, lazy or they genuinely don't know what to say. Prayer simply put, is communication with God. This simple definition for prayer is often practised amongst ourselves, rather than with God. Two lovers can spend hours and hours speaking to each other on the phone yet when it's time to speak to our ultimate lover we tend to find we do not have the stamina to spend hours communicating with Him like we do with our physical lovers.

As an ex-athlete I was always told that it is essential to stretch before any competition. Coaches place a high level of importance on stretching to avoid injuries and to enhance the performance of the individual. There have been times where I had not spent enough time doing a thorough stretch which made me only 50% ready for my match. My muscles felt stiff and as a result I couldn't push my muscles to work at the rate my mind was telling me. My stamina was affected as a result of my inability to prioritise my key stretches.

God wants us to be ready to start our day with the right mindset and to have performed our spiritual stretches so that we can give 100% effort to push through the day and come out victorious. One of the spiritual stretches we can perform today is prayer. Stretch your prayer time and enhance your stamina! If you are used to praying for 15 mins then stretch to 25 mins. God wants you spiritually ready for today so that you will have enough energy and power to fight the schemes of the enemy and a stronger desire to go deeper in fellowship with God. Make spiritual stretching in prayer the key to having a successful day. Don't allow anything or anyone to slow you down. Remember the key is to enjoy prayer not endure it.

**Further study:** James 5:16, 1 Thessalonian 5:18 and Romans 8:26

# DAY 4

# BUILT TO BEND AND NOT BREAK

*"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God" Psalm 92:12 (NIV)*

In our 2021 New Years' Eve service, Pastor Alex reminded us that in 2022 there is a lot for us to possess and achieve. This is our year of growth and expansion no doubt, but that does not mean that 2022 does not bring its own challenges, tests, and trials. Jesus warned us that in this world we will face many troubles and we may experience things that may shake us to the core. The truth is that storms come, with varying severity. Most times we don't know when they will hit, or the extent of the force for which they carry.

*This period of fasting and prayer at the beginning of the year prepares us for storms that may come in the form of the loss of a loved one, a health battle, a financial loss and the list goes on. Yet in Psalm 92, God promises us that the righteous will flourish like a palm tree.*

*The Bible does not mince its words here at all. The palm tree is designed to bend.*

When the storms come, palm trees can bend so much that they can even be horizontal to the ground. They look like they have had a beating so much that they are lying flat down on the ground and will never be able to stand tall again. It may feel like you're in the middle of the storm, but just as the palm tree bends and bends and bends, it does not break and neither will you. In fact, when the storm dies down, the palm tree can stand upright again. The palm tree becomes stronger than it was before the storm. This year, we prepare ourselves for the storms that will come. We do that by seeking God's Kingdom and His Righteousness. We can face whatever 2022 holds and stretch in the face of adversity because we are the righteousness of God. This year we will not only just hear what God is saying but act on what God is saying.

The second part of the verse should not be overlooked. They do not take this place of planting for granted. They are firm - not just coming to church on a Sunday here and there, but are consistent. Consistent in all areas in the House of God. Sunday service, participating in corporate prayer and Bible study. They flourish in the courts of God, serving and impacting all those that come to the House of God. This is the secret to the righteous' flexibility. So, when the storm hits, they may not have anticipated it but they were ready. It may be really hard to bear and it may come with a force that knocks them all the way down, but they do not break. When the storm dies down they get up again and flourish.

If you were bent over by the storms of the pandemic, you are not broken. You can come upright again stronger. As you fast declare that you are like a palm tree!

**Further Study:** Matthew 7:24-29, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Psalms 1:1-6, Job 42:11-17, John 15:1-8

# STRETCH IN WORSHIP

***“Beloved friends, what should be our proper response to God’s marvelous mercies? To surrender yourselves to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights his heart. For this becomes your genuine expression of worship.” Romans 12:1 (TPT)***

When does worship begin and when does worship end for you? Is worship bound to the first 30 minutes of congregation worship in a Sunday service? Sadly, the honest truth is 30 minutes on a Sunday is the only time most Christians today worship God - we only worship God when someone tells us to.

Worship is more than music, it's a lifestyle. Our everyday life should be pleasing and acceptable to God. God desires to hear our praise and worship daily in fellowship during the mundane routine of everyday life. During this time of prayer and fasting, be intentional about praying that God will break any yokes or chains holding your worship captive. This is the foundation, the basic level all Christians start at. This year, let's go to the next level and stretch our worship so that it extends through every season- the good, the bad and the ugly. Go above and beyond, worship with everything and in every season this year! Become a living example of Romans 12:1 so that your entire life becomes a genuine expression of consistent worship to God.

When we actively fill our worship cup during the week, we experience the presence of God in our homes - what do you think happens when we come together on a Sunday ?....the overflow! There is power in the overflow! When we all come full of worship topping up daily in the week because every moment of our lives has been an opportunity to worship God, come Sunday we encounter His glory! Remember the overflow of Paul and Silas' worship? They lifted their voices to worship God in Acts 16 and chains were broken, prisoners set free and salvation made available to even the jailor and his household.

Stretch your worship during this fast, fill your worship cup daily, do not let a day pass without making the choice to worship God. A life overflowing with worship for God, produces a heart ready to be His hands and feet and serve, minister and love unconditionally no matter what.

**Further Study:** 1 Chronicles 16:23-31, John 4:23-24, Psalm 100, Acts 16, Psalm 22:3, 1 Samuel 16:23

**Worship along:**

Move Your Heart - Maverick City Music & UPPERROOM

Such an Awesome God - Maverick City Music

# DAY 5



# DAY SIX

## MORNING STRETCH

*"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you." Isaiah 60:1 (NIV)*

It's 2022 and it's time for the church to get up, stretch and be on its way to revival. After nearly two years of the church being told to lay low due to lockdown measures, many of us have become used to a lazy church. For most of this new decade, we have accessed church from the comfort of our couch and most of us, our beds. We have gotten used to online activities and have forgotten what it felt like to go to Sunday service, midweek Bible study and in person prayer meetings. We used to serve others, being committed to the local church and working for God in it. Now we are even skeptical of physical fellowship, and deprioritise the boost we need from church activities.

Yet, this is the year for us to shake off the slumber and get active again. Now that we are getting up, we are in need of a good stretch. The church, that is you and I, need to plan for more and do more. We, as individuals, need to stretch ourselves this year for the kingdom so we can be ready for what God has in store for the church - He will use you and I to do it. This is the demonstration we give to our children and youth who are behind us.

The church is not a building, it is a living organism made of people who need to be active. God has given every single person a gift and a talent to be developed and stretched so that it can be used at its full potential, for His service. To get there we all need to stretch. If we consider the physical body, stretching is important because it keeps the muscles flexible, strong, and healthy. We need that flexibility to maintain a range of motion in the joints. Without stretching, the muscles shorten and become tight. So then, when you call on the muscles for activity, they are weak and unable to extend all the way. This is exactly what it's like in the body of Christ. If we don't stretch ourselves and challenge ourselves with daily spiritual stretching, when God calls for us for a specific spiritual assignment or if we face a trial or temptation, we will be weak and unable to extend ourselves at the crucial time.

If we want to experience that Isaiah 60 glory, we need a good morning stretch so that we can truly arise and shine!

**Further Study:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 15:34

# DAY 7

# DAILY STRETCH OF

# FORGIVENESS

*"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins". Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV)*

Our focus scripture for today is a reminder that God has an expectation of us in the area of forgiveness. We often recite so easily "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". - God is holding us to this very line. Yet how often do we think that our own unforgiveness is a barrier to accessing God's forgiveness?

There are many scriptures in the Bible that reiterate that forgiveness is reciprocal. God forgave us, so we forgive others. Countless times we read phrases such as 'forgive as the Lord forgave you', or 'forgive and you will be forgiven'.

As you reflect today, ask yourself sincerely, are you holding your end of the bargain up?

You may be tempted to lean on the laurels of grace here and ask "What about grace? Surely, grace gives us access to an endless supply of forgiveness?" You may have had the mindset that there is an allowance of grace so that we can forgive at a convenient time after we have nursed the unforgiveness we have allowed to live in our hearts. However, Hebrews 10:26 says this; 'If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,' or in other words, if we choose to hold onto unforgiveness after knowing that we must forgive as Christ forgives us, there is no more forgiveness left. Ouch!

The reality of God's Word is that there isn't an optimal, or most convenient time to forgive. The Bible says while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Our forgiveness came before we were repentant. We must develop a habit to 'forgive daily' just as we require God's daily forgiveness. Whether big or small, if it offended you, the onus is on you to let it go. Stretch your muscles of forgiveness so that it becomes a lifestyle and not a chore.

During this season of fasting, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you, which people you need to wholeheartedly forgive. Add forgiveness to your list of things you need to deal with for this year ahead. Forgiveness is a gift given to us by God. Every single day we need to use it, or we might just lose it.

**Further Study:** Luke 6:37, Colossians 3:13, Mark 11:25, Matthew 18:21-35

# OUTSTRETCHED ARMS

***“O God, You are my God; with deepest longing I will seek You; My soul [my life, my very self] thirsts for You, my flesh longs and sighs for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water.”***

***Psalms 63:1 (AMP)***

There are many things in this world that crave for our attention. There are also many things we seek to fill the empty void we often experience through this journey of life. Some people look to drugs, alcohol, money, fame, status or love from fellow humans to fill their void. However this approach is commonly short lived and we find ourselves crying out for the same void to be filled. This often leaves us frustrated and stuck in a vicious cycle which produces weariness and heaviness upon our spirit. Everyone is looking for peace, joy and love which is lasting and satisfying. Although many sources claim to guarantee these three things only one man can provide this and His name is Jesus.

King David wrote this Psalm when he was in the wilderness of Judah either running away from the pursuit of King Saul or brief exile from the throne in the rebellion of Absalom. Nonetheless, he found himself at a very low point in his life and instead of turning to other sources to fill the void of worry, fear and loneliness he acknowledges that only God can provide what his flesh and soul is craving. David expresses his desire and desperation for God's presence in one of his most painful seasons. Are we able to demonstrate this level of desire when we feel rejected, defeated, or disappointed with the outcome of our situations?

As we stretch our arms out to our heavenly Father in our distress He will give us exactly what our soul longs for and that's His presence. God wants you to come to Him with an appetite that desires more of Him in your life. As you stretch out your arms today God is giving you peace, joy, rest and love which is unexplainable. Those whose arms are stretched out are those who get filled with His presence. Those who want more, get more! If you want more of God in your life, stretch your arms a little further and watch Him fulfil the desire of your soul.

**Further study:** John 4:7-15, Psalm 42:1-2 and Matthew 5:6

# DAY 8

# DAY NINE

## ***BUSINESS RULES APPLY***

**“And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.”**

**Luke 2:49-50 (NKJV)**

Jesus at the tender age of 12 had gone missing and His parents were angry when they found him in the temple. Jesus’ response was “why are you looking for me? I need to be about my Father’s business!” Jesus had been drawn to go to the temple, not just listening and learning but also teaching and applying His Father’s business rules. Jesus knew what the mission accomplished looked like for Him. He knew that He had been born to die, but knew that He would need to apply The Father’s principles for the process.

Having worked in the tech industry for nearly 7 years, one thing I have learnt is that a client’s business rules must not be overlooked. When I gather requirements and scope from a client it means nothing without the business rules and logic. These are the directives that define an organisation’s business activities. They are important because they clarify an organisation’s objectives and detail how processes will be performed. If we ignore the business rules, we are never able to accurately build a functional product. In fact it would be deemed useless to the client as the outputs would be wrong. In the same way, we cannot ignore our Father’s business rules, we can call these Kingdom Principles.

Adopting the same attitude of 12 year old Jesus, who was humble enough to sit, listen and learn so that he could apply Kingdom Principles to His ministry ahead (which with hindsight was a rollercoaster ride). In the same way, in the good and the bad seasons we need to know these Kingdom Principles; generosity, forgiveness, prayer, love, faith to name a few. The next level is now to stretch ourselves to apply them to the decisions, processes and plans for our lives. We are quality products and cannot waste time producing useless outputs for our Father. Kingdom principles fuel kingdom life. Stretch yourself to live a kingdom life this year!

**Further Study:** Colossians 1:13-14, 1 Corinthians 16:9-10, John 3:3, Ephesians 2:19-20, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:19

# DAY 10

# TWO-WAY STRETCH

*"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." 2 Corinthians 9:6 (NIV)*

Giving is an area which has become so sensitive in the Body of Christ, that preachers and teachers steer away from it. Ironically, talking about receiving blessings and all the things God can do for you as Jehovah Jireh is always trending. Yet giving is a big part of our Christian faith. God gave His only son so that those on the receiving end might get something. God sowed a seed, He sowed His only Son, so that we might have eternal life (if we decide to believe). God gives to us every single day; He provides our daily bread and when we go knocking, He opens the doors to us. We expect God to give but we don't like giving to God in exchange. We expect God to stretch into His storeroom of the miraculous and give to us every time we ask, but we fail to give to Him consistently.

Giving financially is a faith step, showing God that we can give back to Him because we are only stewards of our finances. It's a two-way stretch.

We need to go beyond the attitude of just receiving from God and the church and start to invest and sow into the church. An example I want to use is Hannah. Hannah was a barren woman but yearned to give her husband children. One day, she decided to pray and made a promise to God that if he gave her a son – just one son – she would give him back. She knew her desires would only be fulfilled by God. Yet she was audacious enough in her faith to give her only, even if it meant she wouldn't have anymore. She stretched her faith to the point that she was willing to sacrifice all that God would give her, because she understood that God could do anything and provide everything.

This year we need to go beyond giving our change and give to God our all. As Hannah made a commitment to God, so should we. God is worthy of it. If you don't tithe, stretch yourself this year and commit to giving 10 percent, and watch what God does with your 90%. If you don't even give an offering, commit to giving every week and see how God transforms you into a generous person who can bless others.

Hannah gave her only son, after years of longing for that one child. In return God blessed her with 3 sons and 2 additional daughters. She understood that she needed to stretch herself in giving to God. Now it's your turn. Don't just reach out to receive from God, stretch yourself and give back to God in 2022.

**Further Study:** 1 Samuel 1; 1 Samuel 2:1-10, 1 Samuel 2:21, Genesis 4: 1-7

# STRETCH THROUGH THE PAIN

***“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God”. Romans 8:18-19 (NIV)***

Paul here writes ‘For I consider’ i.e., I know that your perspective when going through hardship matters. How you consider the tough seasons will configure or shape how you come out of the other side. We know from this scripture that there is a present suffering and future glory. So if there is a future glory, then there must also be a present glory - despite the present suffering. Later on in Romans 8:28 Paul writes ‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose’.

So while we are not exempt from hardship, we can be assured that even in those hard times God has a plan for us and the end result will ultimately work out to favour us. How are we to then consider and navigate the challenges life will undoubtedly throw at us?

James, in chapter 1 in verses 2-4, puts it like this; “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”.

Each one's plight will look different. You might be suffering through addiction, struggling with low self esteem or perhaps mourning the death of a loved one. You may be battling with anxiety, your mental, physical or spiritual health may be at jeopardy; whatever it is, know that there is hope. We serve a God who is mighty to save. Nothing is too hard for God. Whatever you are going through today is not worthy to be compared with future glory that we will attain in Christ.

Throughout this fast let us reconsider our suffering with the perspective that we serve a powerful God, the God of the whole earth (Isaiah 54:5). Let us not allow the pain of what we go through rob us of the hope we have in Jesus and the promises we have made plain to us in God's Word. You are an overcomer. You will overcome your suffering and all things will work out for your good.

**Further Study:** Romans 5:3-5, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 5:10, Romans 8:37-38

# DAY 11

# DAY 12

# THE STEWARDSHIP STRETCH

*"Just as each one of you has received a special gift [a spiritual talent, an ability graciously given by God], employ it in serving one another as [is appropriate for] good stewards of God's multi-faceted grace [faithfully using the diverse, varied gifts and abilities granted to Christians by God's unmerited favor]." 1 Peter 4:10 (AMP)*

We all have something that was given to us only by God. No one is exempt from that - each of us has been blessed with a gift and the purpose of that gift is to bring God glory. Every one of us has been given talents, time, and treasure so what have we done with these and what will we do with them since we are all stewards of God. The word "steward" is rooted in the Greek word "oikonomos," which means "the manager of a household".

So often in the body of Christ if we are not given the 'obvious' gift such as the ability to sing or preach we step back into the shadows believing that the gifts we have are insignificant, they hold no real value in the house of God. The danger of this is that we are allowing our wrong thoughts to cause us to fail in our job as stewards of God. We need to understand that our lives are not our own. Our life is on loan from God, regardless if you acknowledge this or not.

God calls you to steward everything about our lives for his glory and the good of others. Given the word for Alive City Church this year is 'Growth and Expansion', we have to stretch ourselves to step into the fullness of our roles as stewards of God. Stop making excuses, stop lurking in the back - step forward and take action because if you are a manager of what ultimately belongs to God, you will definitely have to give an account back to God, our boss.

In a work setting, we all want to impress the boss and would bend over backwards, working late to go above and beyond to show the leadership that we are good stewards over what we have. Yet, in the Kingdom many of us give less to God. We fail to realise that the promotion that we seek comes from God ( Psalm 75:6-7). This year, we need to stop dissociating the gifts we have been given and its relevance to the church. Reflecting on the gifts you use in the workplace, at home and amongst friends and family - what do people know you for? What do they always come to you to help with? Now consider if the church benefits from these gifts, do they know you have them? We all want to hear those words when we enter heaven, "well done, good and faithful servant".

A good steward is committed to selfless service, they embrace innovation and change, they are team players, they believe in communication and being transparent and they always acknowledge and thank the master they serve. In 2022, stretch yourself in the area of stewardship, knowing that you have done everything you possibly can to nurture what God has given you.

**Further Study:** Matthew 25:14-30, Titus 1:7, Colossians 3:23, 1 Corinthians 4:2, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, 2 Timothy 1:14

# DAY THIRTEEN

## STRETCH MARKS

**“Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” Daniel 6:3 (NIV)**

When we stretch ourselves for God’s kingdom, God puts a mark on us. We are distinguished and highly favoured. Stretching ourselves in the kingdom requires discipline, a little stretch everyday is what changes us. When you consistently stretch yourself to serve, to give, to pray and fast to live for Him, God honours you by putting his mark on you. Stretching brings growth in all aspects of your life such that you are marked by all to see.

Let’s consider Daniel, a young man who was very disciplined and who stretched himself so much that he became distinguished. Daniel was disciplined in fasting and prayer. In Daniel chapter 1, Daniel was offered the best of everything in the king’s palace, but the Bible said that ‘Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself’. Daniel made up his mind, in other words, he decided and then he acted. As a result of his decision to stretch himself beyond his peers so that he could please God, the Bible says, ‘Now God granted Daniel favour’. In 2022, the favour you are looking for is a result of your stretch, your resolve to set yourself apart for God. This fast can change the course of your life. Daniel’s 10-day fruit fast did just that. He fasted faithfully, disciplined, having made up his mind to seek God and as a result he was better and healthier than all the young men who ate the king’s finest food. Favour does not just come by ad hoc prayer requests; it comes by discipline.

Later in Daniel chapter 6, we read that Daniel distinguished himself among all his peers, his colleagues in high places and they were jealous of him. They knew that his secret to his distinction was his commitment to prayer. In fact, they set up a trap which meant Daniel found himself in a den of lions. Yet his discipline in prayer also gave him favour with even lions, because even they recognised that Daniel was marked!

Commit yourself to this fast and God will distinguish you. Commit yourself to prayer and even your enemies will work for you. Kingdom discipline is rewarded with favour. God will put his mark on you!

**Further Study:** Daniel 1, Daniel 2, Daniel 6, Genesis 39:1-6, Genesis 39:20-23



# STRETCH YOUR IMAGINATION

***"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Genesis 22:17-18 (NIV)***

What do you see when you think about your life? Do you see yourself doing the things that you think you should be able to achieve at this stage of your life, with your skills and from your background? Or do you see the incredible things that God has in store for you? The mind-blowing things that totally disregard your current status.

God needed to break it down to Abraham like this, with metaphors and similes because he wanted him to stretch his imagination. He wanted to get an old man, who had walked faithfully with Him, to dream crazy dreams. To dare to believe that his descendents would be so plentiful that they would be like millions of grains of sand that fill the banks of seashores. How amazing! I bet Abraham struggled to see anything else but this image when he closed his eyes.

Acts 2:17 says that 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams'. We need to allow God to stretch our imagination to have a vision in line with his magnificent vision He has for us.

God wants us to fathom the extent of what He is capable of if we can do as Abraham did when we walk in faithfulness and obedience. Our vision expands beyond what looks possible, because we are close to God, in constant communication with Him. We need to be willing to have sacrificial obedience even if it means letting go of things we treasure the most. We need to be so in tune with God that we can trust that His instructions never contradict the vision he has given us - even if they seem crazy.

We need to imagine ourselves free from affliction, imagine ourselves free from addiction. Imagine our families following us to church and knowing God for themselves. We need to imagine our churches filled with people turning away from sin. We need to cast down any imagination that tries to exalt itself above the knowledge and the truth of God so that your imagination is free to run wild with God. If you struggle to imagine these things for yourself, or struggle to believe the visions God is trying to give you, for whatever reason, you need to consume yourself in God's reality laid out in His word in this period of fasting and prayer. Search for scriptures that speak truth and life into your situation and let your imagination run wild!

We need to visualise it all. Visualise freedom and visualise your breakthrough. Write how it feels to finally be healed from that long term illness or to be finally holding your child in your arms. Visualise yourself being used by God in mighty ways for the kingdom. Stretch your imagination!

**Further Study:** 2 Corinthians 10:5, Habakkuk 2:2-3, Jeremiah 29:11; Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 11:17-19

# DAY 14

# DAY 15

# HOLY SPIRIT ACTIVATE

*"God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace".*

*1 Peter 1:2 (NLT)*

"Holy Spirit activate, Holy Spirit activate, Holy Spirit activate, activate, I said activate!"

This is a well known meme that became popular late last year. We may have laughed but we all know there is truth in this. We need the Holy Spirit to activate His power in our lives every single day. One of the most important areas in our lives for which we should be singing (or praying for) this, is in the area of holiness. Holiness comes as a gift to us when we declare Jesus Christ as our Lord and saviour, God declares that we are now holy (1 Peter 2:9). If we have received this gift then we should use it. Sanctification is the process of becoming holy and that is where we often drop the ball. We receive the gift but spend little, to no time, going through the process to develop it. Our holiness is first and foremost our devotion to God and this definitely requires stretching.

Now holiness does not just mean isolating and withdrawing from all things worldly but it is choosing daily, to dance to the music of the Holy Spirit, rather than the music of the world (metaphorically and literally). It is stretching ourselves to make the intentional choice to practice spiritual disciplines, to discipline ourselves to cultivate mature fruit of the Spirit. Remember, we do not become holy by our own efforts, it is the daily activation of the Holy Spirit's power within us! According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "activate" means 'to cause something to start' but there is also a chemistry (specialised) definition; 'to make a chemical reaction happen more quickly especially by heating'. The Holy Spirit's power is a catalyst for our holiness.

God's standard for holiness is clear, the Bible says in 1 Peter 1:16 'For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."' - He is who we are striving to be like, not your favorite worship leader, not your friend who has been saved for 20 years, not even your pastor. Going back to the chemistry definition of activate is really exciting because heat is an activator often used in chemistry to get things going in a reaction. Do you need the fire of the Holy Spirit to ignite your process of sanctification? Do you need to reevaluate what you are using for your standard of holiness? This year's fasting period is the time to stretch yourself in the process of becoming holy, don't wait until everything seems right or when you have lived your 'full' life in the world before you set yourself apart for God! The Holy Spirit is your helper, and He can activate your sanctification, if you are willing.

**Further Study:** 1 Peter 1, Psalm 119:9, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Hebrews 12:14, 2 Timothy 1:9, Psalm 139:23-24, Leviticus 20:26

# DAY SIXTEEN

## ***STRETCH THE TRUTH***

**“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” Ephesians 1:13 (KJV)**

Jesus Christ saved us by dying for us on the cross and that is the gospel truth. He died so that we could have eternal life with God in heaven after we die. Yet it was not just for after we die, but for today, so that we could have a relationship with God here on earth and so that we could break free from the shackles of sin as well as be cleared of the wages of sin which is death. It is this message of the truth which we have believed, and which has transformed our lives from the inside out.

This wonderful truth is not to be kept a secret. It's to go beyond ourselves and the good thoughts in our minds and the fuzzy feeling in our hearts. It is to stretch and go far to the ends of the earth and as Christians it's our duty to stretch the truth to our communities and beyond. This year in 2022 challenge yourself to engage in the great commission Christ gave to the church. The world is longing for the revelation, and it is each and everyone of us' duty to contribute to the spread of the gospel. We need to stretch the truth into the school's gates, our offices, to our friends and our family.

Today reflect on the barriers in you stretching the gospel truth far and wide. In Romans 10, the Bible says, 'how will they believe if they have not heard?' We must be intentional this year to share this truth. The world is perishing, and we have the solution. We need to pray to have a desire to see God's church grow so that lives can be transformed. This is the heart of our Father, and we should pray to have a heart for that too.

This is the year of growth and expansion for Alive City Church. Let's stretch ourselves to invite at least 5 people to church this year so that they too can see that the seeds of truth you sow can grow and bear fruit. This is how we grow God's kingdom, by sharing the truth and stretching it beyond ourselves. If each of us personalises this mission, God's church will surely grow.

**Further Study:** John 14:5-14, Matthew 28:16-20, 2 Corinthians 4:1-4, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 10:13-15

# STRETCH YOUR DESIRES

***“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” 1 Corinthians 14:1 (ESV)***

During this period of fasting and prayer you may have a list of things you are praying about and believing God for. Or perhaps after ‘Stretch your Imagination’ on day 14 you have been imagining yourself achieving big goals or realising visions that God has given you in the past.

One of the things that should be on our list of things to desire and seek God for is spiritual gifts. In this scripture Paul writes that we should ‘pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts’. This speaks to the motivation of the gifts, being love, as well as the fervency in which this should be sought after.

When it comes to physical gifts, typically the older we get the more apathetic we tend to get about receiving gifts. There might be one or two people that we expect gifts from but outside of that any other gifts we get is a bonus. So we’re indifferent. Unfortunately, even as believers we often bring this indifference for gifts into our relationship with God. So for us to get into the frame of mind of earnestly seeking gifts, let us cast our minds back to a time when receiving good presents really exhilarated us.

Think back to when you were a child and how important it was for you to receive gifts at special occasions. How valued and excited it made you feel when you actually got what you had been asking for. How eager you were to try them out when you opened your gifts and see what you could do with them. Now think about where that desire first came from. Perhaps it was the new Playstation that everyone craved or the new trainers that were in fashion at the time. The desire comes from collective experience and expectation. Perhaps you knew someone who had the new Playstation and they were talking about their experience, that would have spurred you on to desire it even more. No wonder then Paul talks to the whole church, encouraging us to desire spiritual gifts for the furtherance of the church.

As members of the body of Christ we should not be intimidated by the idea of operating in spiritual gifts. Let us grow in our collective excitement about the gifts and pray earnestly that God will give us these gifts so that we can walk in power and build up the church in love. If you’re stuck with what gift to ask for first, Paul calls out prophecy! Why not start there. And remember, the gifts are for the building up of the church, so while we are praying for God to give them, also seek opportunities to share them!

**Further Study:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 1 Peter 4:10-11, Romans 12:6-8

# DAY 17

# DAY 18

# FACING GIANTS

*“The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you.”*

*1 Samuel 17:37 (AMP)*

I have come to realise that throughout our faith journey there will be giants that we will encounter. These giants come as obstacles that serve as barriers to our breakthrough. Some believers turn away from their God given opportunity when they encounter a giant while others are prepared to fight and grab hold of the opportunity that's on the other side. When we study David's encounter with Goliath the scriptures clearly highlight that before there was a giant, there was a lion and a bear that David had to defeat. His experience with the lion and the bear made him ready for the giant. He didn't waiver when he saw the giant but rather David was confident in his God given ability and above all he was confident in his God.

God wants us to have the same confidence as David when we approach our giant. David was not intimidated by Goliath's size or the words coming out of his mouth. David was fully aware that God had given him every necessary weapon to defeat Goliath which didn't look like much to others, nevertheless it was enough for David.

There are giants we have to face in every season that come in different dimensions, however God is always training us for the next giant. What you killed spiritually in the previous season has given you the confidence and faith to kill the giant in the next season. Every giant comes with a reward! There was a reward waiting for David after killing his giant. Are you ready to slay your giant and grab your reward? This is going to take some stretching however God would not stretch you beyond the ability He has given you. God may have stretched your faith in the last season and He wants to stretch it even further in this season. The question is would you allow your faith to be stretched so that you would see even more of God's power and obtain your reward? There is victory in the stretch against giants.

God has given us every necessary weapon to defeat our giants. The problem we have is that we are too busy examining the size, its weight and other intimidating features that try to threaten us. This year we will meet many giants and our ultimate weapon is our tongue. Are you ready to speak God's Word of victory to your giant? Victory is in your mouth, you just need to declare it!

**Further study:** 1 Samuel 17, 2 Kings 6:8-22

# DAY NINETEEN

## ***STRETCH YOURSELF***

**“Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and in the evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that or whether both will do equally well”. Ecclesiastes 11:4-6 (NIV)**

Try new things! If this scripture is not a challenge or encouragement to us to try new things then I don’t know what else will spur us on. You won’t know if your next ‘breakthrough idea’ will actually breakthrough unless you try. And you will never find where those undiscovered passions of yours lie unless you try new things.

God does not want us to stay at the same level. He wants us to succeed and not to be stagnant and idle. Sowing seeds and reaping the fruits of that labour. God wants us to do well. There may be things you have been putting off doing or starting and God is saying the time is now! For those that always wait for the perfect time to begin a project will not sow and will not reap.

There is also a window of opportunity here that should not be missed. Your church needs you. Your local community needs you. The kingdom needs you. It needs you with a ‘yes attitude’. It needs you to really grasp the true sentiment of this scripture. There is so much yet to be born out of you and that requires willingness to sow your seed in the morning and in the evening let not your hands be idle.

Today, really think about what you can do for God. If you’re stuck, then commit time during this fast to pray on just that. God needs you to discover your gifts and explore them in the safety of his Kingdom. Stretch yourself to try new things for your next big step but more importantly try something new for God.

**Further Study:** Zechariah 4:10, Ephesians 2:10, Matthew 25:14–30

# FAITH STRETCHERS

***“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:22-24 (NIV)***

The Bible makes it clear that not all faith levels are the same, there are different levels on the faith scale. Jesus had encounters with people that moved Him so much that He made a point to distinguish them because of the great level of faith shown.

The woman who had an issue of blood for 12 years had decided that she could no longer rely on doctors and physicians for healing. Her faith level had bubbled up to the point where she decided to take a risk.

According to Jewish law, a woman with her condition was to be in isolation because anyone she touched would be contaminated. Yet she weaved her way through crowds that were swarming Jesus and stretched enough just to touch the hem of His garment, knowing that Jesus was able. The disciples thought Jesus was mad to ask who had touched him, when He was being pressed on every side by people who had faith enough to get something from Him. Yet her touch was different, and amidst the many requests and the shouts to get His attention, Jesus asked a question that silenced the place. “Who touched me?”

In other words, Jesus was asking whose faith was that? Power had been forced out of Him to do that, what had been believed for. Her faith had stretched and taken what was available to her in Christ Jesus.

We are not talking about a physical touch but a stretch of faith. Remember the Roman centurion who came to Jesus because he had a servant who was paralysed and suffering badly. Jesus offered to come to his house and heal him and the Centurion declined and said just send your word of healing because he believed that Jesus’ word was enough. His faith had risen to a level where he understood the authority, power and dominion Jesus had over every named thing here on earth. This level of faith amazed Jesus. His Word was enough.

This year, challenge your current faith level to move up notch. Do what it takes to stretch it so that you can obtain what is yours in Christ Jesus. Reflect on what this could look like for you, and in what area you need to become a Faith Stretcher today.

**Further reading:** Mark 5:25-34, Mathew 8:5-13, Matthew 15:22-28

# DAY 20

# DAY 21

# THE FINAL STRETCH

*“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)*

We have come to the end of the fast but we are only at the beginning of the year. It's not just about how you start but certainly how you finish.

In a cross country race, everyone starts together, everyone looks strong and it looks like anyone can win it. However as they cover more of a distance and as the terrain changes and crucially depending on their training, many will slow down, some can maintain the speed at which they started with and few will speed up. This fast is part of your training for the whole year, the full duration of the race. How you finish is so important, but the last stretch is the hardest part.

In the last stretch, it is mind over matter. You can do it, but can you believe that you have done it. Do you visualise yourself getting to the end of the year being more on fire than you were before the calendar reset to 1st January? Finishing the year strong is the goal, that's why we prepare ourselves spiritually. Jesus, God Himself, needed to fast for 40 days and 40 nights to discipline His flesh.

The Bible tells us that our flesh wars against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). In the final stretch, The Bible says that the devil came to Jesus and tried to tempt Him to break early, by taunting Him to prove that He was the Son of God by turning stones into bread. All of this was happening whilst Jesus was hungry, in other words, when His flesh was weak. Yet His Spirit man stretched him to not succumb. However, suppose Jesus did only 40 days and no nights? Imagine if Jesus fasted for 39 days and 39 nights – it wouldn't have been the same if he did not push through the final stretch. He wouldn't have come out on top.

Today, I want to encourage anyone who has been fasting to stay strong and fight your flesh each day at a time. Just how you have practised disciplining your flesh during this 21-day fast, be sure to keep that discipline day by day throughout the year. When you feel weak spiritually mid-year, don't wait for a corporate fast - do it on your own. Jesus fasted alone so He could be ready for His personal mission ahead.

This year, will you challenge yourself to fast, on your own accord, when you are feeling spiritually weak? Let us push all the way through, even to the final stretch of the year so that we finish strong!

**Further Study:** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Hebrews 12:1-13, Isaiah 40:29-31



LET'S STRETCH!

