

Faith

Part 2 – Building Your Spiritual Muscle

How many of you have faith? I'll need a volunteer for a test of faith. If you have faith, I want you to command my Bible to be removed and turn up at the back of the auditorium. Is there anyone here who can do that?

Of course not, and we're going to see why.

Mat 17:14-20

Why couldn't anyone move my Bible?

Jesus said that with faith like a mustard seed, we could move a mountain, and nobody here can even move my Bible.

There are many reasons for that, but today we're going to look at just one.

Why is it that when we try to exercise faith, there are times when nothing seems to happen?

We're going to look at one of those reasons.

And for that I'm going to give you a simple definition of faith: Faith is spiritual muscle.

I'm hoping that this definition will help you understand some things about faith – and might even open up a whole new world of possibilities for you.

Faith is spiritual muscle.

Because faith, just like muscles, can grow.

And just like one set of muscles may be strong and another weak, you can have strong faith in one area, and weak faith in another.

Also, some of your muscles are more important than others.

If your biceps aren't as big as Arnold Schwarzenegger's, that's okay. But if your heart muscle is diseased, you're history.

In the same way, faith for some things is more important than faith for others.

For instance, it's more important to have faith for salvation, than faith for healing.

And it's more important to have the faith to ride out the storms of life than it is to make money.

People get upset about the most pathetic things: someone sat in their seat, someone didn't ask their opinion, someone didn't notice them.

If we don't have the faith to get through these paltry little things without getting upset, we will never stand in the real trials of life.

So what's this got to do with faith? Everything.

Rom 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall **LIVE** by faith."

Faith has got to do with everything in your life.

If you're a Christian, how you live your life day by day is a reflection of your faith.

It's not just how many times you've seen a miracle or been healed.

But today I want to look at building our spiritual muscle – building our faith.

Imagine you decide to join a gym. You see this huge guy lifting huge weights, and tell the instructor that you want to do that too. The instructor smiles and takes you to a corner where he gets you lifting small weights. You're not very happy about that, but the instructor insists. Finally he wanders off to supervise someone else. This is your big chance. You sneak away as quickly as you can to where the big guy was, and lie down on the bench. You grip the weight – and you cannot budge it.

This is how it works with most things in life.

You don't wake up one morning in 7th Grade and say, "I think I'll be a rocket scientist." And then go out and apply to NASA.

You've got to do training.

It's the same with music, carpentry, teaching, nursing and most other areas.

The Bible says, (Rom 1:19-20) "because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. (20) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse"

This tells us that many of God's principles are revealed in the natural realm.

Here's one of them – you have to work at developing everything in life – and faith is no exception.

That's why Paul says in 1 Tim 4:7, "... exercise yourself towards godliness."

I once had iritis (inflammation of the iris which can develop into glaucoma). I tried to beat it by faith and I couldn't. Iritis is often a recurring disease. Eighteen months later I got it again. And then again. And then again. But during this time, God was building my faith. One day I could feel it start to happen. My eyes got sore and red, and there was pain behind eyes. But I started to resist it in the name of Jesus. It stopped. Then again a few months later the same thing happened. And then again some time later.

I've never had it since – that's quite a number of years ago now.

What I'm saying is that somehow we've got to build our faith muscles.

How do we do that?

By cramming more of the Word of God into our brains?

No, that's good, but God's Word is food for the spirit.

And if you just eat and eat and don't exercise you just get fat.

Churches are full of fat Christians who read the Word of God but can't cope with the basic things of life.

So this is how we build our faith: we start an exercise programme.

We've got to change the way we view things.

We've got to see that every day is full of possibilities to exercise our faith.

And you do that the same way you'd exercise your body's muscles.

1. Start small and build up

Take little bit size chunks that you can handle.

Don't set unrealistic goals, set goals your faith can reach to.

For instance, lots of Christians when they get a cold, they rush to see their doctor; if they get a headache, they reach for the Panadol. So when little challenges come along, their spiritual muscles are just getting flabby.

Then when something serious comes along, maybe life-threatening, they try to heave it out of their life using their flabby faith, and nothing happens. Then they say, “Where was God? Why can’t my faith do the job?”

There could be other reasons, but maybe it’s because our spiritual muscles don’t get enough exercise.

Am I saying you should never take medicine or go to a doctor?

No – I’m saying that if we want to be able to deal with big things, we should start with the small things.

2. Take some faith steps

Do something.

Don’t just pray – do something concrete that will head you in the right direction

Notice I said faith steps, not a huge leap that you may not be able to handle.

For instance, the topic of tithing is very difficult for some. How does a person who doesn’t have enough faith to tithe learn how to tithe? Here are some faith steps you can take. First, work out a percentage of your income you feel you can handle but is stretching your faith a little. You might start with 5%. Second, set your faith goals, and build into those faith goals your faith steps. You might say, “I’m going to increase my giving by 1% every two months till I reach 10%”.

This is how to increase your faith – small faith steps, slowly increasing the challenge.

Mark 11:23-24 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be removed and be cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. (24) Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

We can’t move mountains, if we just stand still.

3. Be persistent in your faith

Far too many Christians give up before they see the results of their faith.

It’s amazing how many weak and wimpy Christians there are who give up when they don’t see immediate results.

Then they sulk, “God doesn’t answer my prayers, so I’m not talking to Him.”

Gal 6:7-9 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (8) For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (9) And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

“Do not be deceived”.

We get some strange ideas of what it means to be deceived.

For instance, people think that deception is when you believe you’re the prophet Elijah reincarnated. Or you start preaching that God wants us to kill our children.

Sure, that’s deception.

But Galatians makes it really simple and relevant to everyday living – anybody who doesn’t realise that what they sow is what they will reap, has been successfully deceived by Satan.

Anyone who doesn’t understand the principle of sowing and reaping has been deceived.

How do we know if we don’t understand this principle?

It tells us right here.

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

If you start saying things like, “Well, when’s it going to happen? What’s taking God so long?”, and you give up, you’ve been deceived, because you don’t understand the principle of sowing and reaping.

So let me explain how it works.

When I was about ten years old, I planted a patch of potatoes in the back yard. The next day I went out to water them and check them. No potatoes. The next day I checked them again. No potatoes. Where were they?

When you sow something, it takes time for it to grow.

It may take time for a prayer to be answered.

It takes time for spiritual muscles to grow.

In the meantime, the key is: never give up.

Summary

- 1. Start small, and build up**
- 2. Take some faith steps**
- 3. Be persistent in your faith**

Remember, “the just shall LIVE by faith”.