

“Why muscle matters.”

There was a man who got a job as an usher at a picture house; he was walking up the aisle before the film was about to start, when he came across a man lying over 4 seats in the back row, the usher went over to the man and said, “Sir, you need to sit up and only take one seat” But the man just moaned, so the usher said, “Excuse me sir, you really need to sit up and if you don’t, I will get the manager.” But the man still didn’t move, he just lay there and moaned.

So the usher got the manager, and the manager said, “Excuse me sir, would you please get up and only use one seat, we need these seats for paying customers.” But still, the man didn’t move. So the manager said, “OK, if you don’t move I am going to phone for the Police,” but the man still didn’t move.

So the manager got the police and the policeman said, “Sir, what is your name”? And the man replied, “Tommy,” the policeman said, “and where do you come from Tommy?” the man said, “the balcony”.

And the moral of the story is, if people don’t move it’s probably because there is something wrong. It is God’s intention that we all as Christians move, we move in the direction of Christ likeness. We are supposed to transform into the shape that God destined us for, the shape or image of Jesus. So, if we don’t move or transform it must mean that there is something wrong.

What the New Testament says is that we are meant by God to work out our Salvation, in other words we are to pursue in increasing Spiritual fitness. Why? Why do muscles matter? I’m going to share with you why you need to have big spiritual muscles.

You see it all has to do with this word called, “Authority”. I believe that the sad truth is that many of God’s children are living beneath their privileges. That’s because Satan is active in trying to prevent Christians from knowing their authority in the Kingdom of Heaven. You see, Jesus came to wage war against the dominion of darkness.

The Bible says in 1 John 3:8, “The reason the son of man came was to destroy the works of the devil”. We know that the devil still has great dominion in the world, the Bible even says in Ephesians 2:2, “He’s the prince of the air.” But what Jesus has done is basically set up a Kingdom behind enemy lines. And now, you and I are soldiers in that Kingdom and we have received from our commanding officer the necessary enabling to drive back the forces of the enemy.

Matthew 28:18+19 says, “Jesus came to them and said all authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations”. What Jesus means is that in this new Kingdom there is powerful authority to drive back the forces of Hell.

Now let me tell you what Satan wants to do to you as a Christian, He wants to put you in a P.O.W. camp. Let me explain. You see, if you’re in Christ, you are on the winning side; you’re on the side that wins the war. What Satan wants to do though, is put you in a P.O.W. camp so that you can’t make any contribution to the battle, all you do is just sit there and wait for the thing to be over.

That’s what he wants to do with every Christian. Now if you are a new Christian, you need to understand what a powerful warrior you can be for Jesus Christ in this battle. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves then to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you”. Romans 16:20 says, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”.

Now we have all pictured ourselves running away from Satan but have you ever pictured Satan running away from you? Because the Bible says that kind of potential exists. Satan is more aware of your authority in Christ than you are. Ephesians 1:18-21 says, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come”.

Now the scriptures say, that “Jesus Christ is now above every authority, he is above every power and every dominion” and it says, “The power that put him in authority is the power at work in us”. That’s what it says, “His incomparably great power at work for us who believe”.

Paul says basically the same thing over in **Ephesians 3:20**, it says, **“Now then, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask and imagine”**. Look what comes next, **“According to his power that is at work in us”**.

Let me tell you something, a Christian, who knows his identity and knows his mission, makes hell nervous. So, what Satan wants to do, is to keep you from ever understanding all that you can be in becoming that. You see, a new believer in Christ is a spiritual baby, and even though he might be a child of the king and possessor of all that authority. A baby doesn't know how to use its authority.

And if Satan can keep you a spiritual baby, then the tremendous power and authority available to you to knock down the gates of hell will never be realised. And that's why you need to work out, that's why muscle matters, it's why you need to grow up in Christ. And the word for that, in scripture is the word **“Maturity”**. And that's the great call of Scripture.

Years ago, a woman called **Amy Grant** sung a song called **“Fat Baby.”** I think you'll get the point after I've read the words.

I know a man, maybe you know him too,  
You never can tell, he might even be you,  
He knelt at the altar and that was the end,  
He's saved and that's all that matters to him,  
His spiritual tummy, it can't take too much,  
One day a week, he gets his spiritual lunch,

On Sunday he puts on his spiritual best,  
And gives his language a spiritual rest,  
He's just a fat little baby,  
He wants his bottle and he doesn't mean maybe,  
He's sampled solid food once or twice,  
But he says doctrine leaves him cold as ice,

He's been baptised, sanctified, redeemed by the blood,  
But he says his daily devotions are down in the mud,  
He knows the books of the Bible and John 3:16,  
He's got the biggest King James you've ever seen,

I've always wondered if he'll grow up some day,  
He's mama's boy, and he likes it that way,  
If you happen to see him, tell him I said,  
He'll never grow, if he never gets fed,  
He's just a fat little boy; He's just a fat little boy.

Anybody get the point? There was a teacher, who had been teaching for **25 years**, and there was a promotion available in the school administration, and so she applied. And she became very upset when the headmaster gave the job to a teacher, who had not taught nearly as long. And so she went in to complain and she said, **“I've got 25 years experience in teaching”**, And the headmaster said, **“No you don't, you have one year experience, 25 times”**. **“In other words, you've never grown, you've never matured, you've never developed as a teacher”**.

Now Christian, that's exactly what Satan wants to do to you. **There are many Christians today that suffer from ‘Peter Pan syndrome’, you know the little boy who said, “I don't want to grow up”**.

There are many Christians today, like the little boy who had his first night in a big bed, after 3 years in a cot, and he got in. In the middle of the night his mum and dad heard him cry, and when they went through, the little boy was lying on the floor, rubbing his head, and his parents said, **“What happened”?** The little boy said, **“I guess I stayed too close to where I got in”**.

And that's exactly what many Christians do. The New Testament does not treat your growth or your transformation as an option. The Bible says for example in **1 Peter 2:2**, **“Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it, you may grow up in your salvation”**. Memorise that phrase, **“Grow up in your salvation”**.

1 Peter 3:18 says, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ”. In fact, the New Testament authors just don’t have much use for spiritual couch potatoes. They don’t have much use for continual spiritual flabbiness.

Hebrews 5:11-14 says, “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil”. Notice that phrase! “They have trained themselves”.

You see, you have nothing to do with your justification just like a baby has nothing to do with its conception. But a baby has something to do with its development and you have a lot to do with your spiritual fitness. You must train yourself, you can’t stay a fat little baby; you’re supposed to grow up and work out that salvation.

And so, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:1+2, “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly, mere infants in Christ, I gave you milk not solid food for you were not ready for it, indeed you are still not ready”. Paul’s trying to say as diplomatically as he can, “You’re still a bunch of fat babies, when are you going to grow up and do the things that you need to do, to put on some spiritual muscle?”

I want you to understand that the call to maturity in the New Testament is not a call to perfection but it is a call to progress and it is an urgent call because there is an urgent need for Christ likeness and **why?** If we are going to effectively use the authority Christ has given us, against the gates of hell, we must reflect his image. People that don’t look like Jesus cannot use his authority. We must put on muscle, we must get in shape, and we’ve got to work out our salvation.

And that is why the first Christians committed themselves to an exercise programme while they were still babies. You remember the story in Acts chapter 2 after the very first sermon. Acts 2:41+42, “People responded powerfully, those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3000 were added to their number that day”.

Now notice as soon as they are born they start exercising! “They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teachings and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”. I want to suggest to you that we would do well to go back 2000 years and start exercising like the very first Christians did. As soon as they were baptized they made 4 exercises a priority.

1. They made it a priority to become bible based, “They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teachings”.

I know that if my son Joshua doesn’t have an appetite, Josh is sick and I get concerned, because I know that, I do not have to cokes Josh to eat if he is healthy. In fact, one thing we all know that’s had little babies in our house, when they are ready to eat, you can’t distract them. Now, you can distract me, but if you get a little baby, when it’s time to eat, he’s not distracted, he’s going to focus on eating and he’s going to let you know about it, until you satisfy that need. Now, a baby Christian is only going to become a healthy growing Christian on a strong diet of the word of God.

You see, you’ve got to feed that new nature, so that you lose taste for the old garbage you used to take in. Now every Christian has to learn how to feed themselves. We all have seen little children when we feed them for the 1<sup>st</sup> year or 2, but there comes a point when we try to teach them to feed themselves. Do you remember how messy that was? Do you remember how they would get food on the floor, food on the table and food in the hair, food on the clothes and food all over the face? But, they always managed to get a little something in.

Now that’s what you need to do, if you’re a baby Christian. You may not know much about feeding yourself, but you get stuck right in to your bible and something good is going to get in. And the more you do it, the more you learn how to do it. But having said that, I think it’s important for all Christians, especially for new Christians to regularly sit at the feet of the Churches teachers.

It says “They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teachings”. They got regularly at the feet of men that were the leaders of the church and said, “Teach us God’s word”. And you need to do the same thing. You need to make it a regular habit of coming to this church and sitting at the feet of the teachers who have been appointed by this church to feed the flock and soak it up.

There was a woman who was very nervous about crossing a busy road; she didn't know how to cross over, she stood there and stood there. Until finally a strong looking young man walked up and put his arm inside her elbow and said, "May I cross the road with you?"

She was relieved until they got out on to the road, they were all over the place, dodging cars and they almost got knocked over a few times, finally they made it to the other side; she turned around angrily and said, "You call that help, you look like your blind" And he said, "I am blind, that's why I said can I cross the street with you?"

Now you better be very careful about who's going to be leading you in your new walk with Christ and what the church does, it says, "Here are men and woman who can teach". You need to come and sit at their feet. You cannot put on muscle without the word of God in your life. The Bible says in 1 John 2:14, "I write to you young men because you are strong and the word of God lives in you and you've overcome the evil one". You need to make it a priority to become bible based.

2. You need to become prayer powered, it says, "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings and they devoted themselves to prayer". Prayer is the very breath of the Christian soldier. Remember in Ephesians 6 after that long list of verses that talk about the armour of God, it says in verse 18, "And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests".

Have you ever seen a pigeon walk, or waddle? Have you ever seen how strange it is, when a pigeon walks? There is a reason for that. While he's moving, the pigeon cannot focus, He has to take a step, then stop and focus, Takes another step, then stop and focus, and that's how he progresses.

And that is exactly how God wants you to live. You are constantly stopping and refocusing by getting in touch with your God, and letting him direct your steps. When the Bible says, "To pray without ceasing." What that means is, you live your life in reference to God, every hour of every day, you be remembering God. You want to be more like Jesus? You're going to have to spend time with Him. And it's through Jesus name that you receive the power to experience victories over the hosts of hell. Let me tell you something Christian, Hell, is not afraid of your name, hell, is afraid of Jesus name. And it is in Jesus name that you received the authority to be a warrior for God. So, you become bible based and prayer powered.

3. Make it a priority to become cross-centred. Notice it says, "They devoted themselves to the breaking of the bread".

Have you ever been looking through an old photo album and suddenly you see a picture you haven't seen in a long time? And you see a face that you haven't thought about for a while, but that picture brings back memories and you remember a very special relationship.

One of the reasons we have the Lord's Supper at this church is because it is a picture that calls us back to a relationship we must never forget. The Lord's Supper is a sermon without words. 1 Corinthians 11:26 says, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes".

But let me say that this commitment is more than just saying, "I'm going to come to church every Sunday to take the Lord's Supper". What I think is happening in Acts 2, when it says, "They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread." Is that they are remembering that all of life is to be shaped by the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

Whenever you want to talk about ethics or moral decisions in everyday life, the bible keeps saying, "Go back to the cross". You need to become a cross-centred person. Let me say this to you, there is no Christianity without a cross. Without a cross, you are a Christian without strength; you are a Christian without muscle, a Christian without authority. You need to become, a cross-centred person, and that sacrifice, affects influences and impacts every major decision of your life.

4. You need to make it a priority to become family focused. "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings, to prayer, to the breaking of bread" and it says, "They devoted themselves to fellowship". You can do many things by yourself but being a strong Christian is not one of them. You must believe to be saved, because you are saved, but you must belong to grow.

The Bible says in Romans 12:5, "So in Christ we who are many from one body and each member belongs to all the others".

The Bible says in **Ephesians 2:19**, “**You are members of God’s very own family, citizens of God’s country and you belong in God’s household with every other Christian**”. If you are a new believer in Christ, you need to know how important it is to have other Christians in your life to help you grow. You need to go to a Bible class. You need to get together with a small group of Christians to pray. And you need to be a part of a family.

**Did you know there are over 30 New Testament commands that you cannot obey without a spiritual family?** One of them is to share your blessings. It is very significant, when we read about those very first Christians exercising in **Acts 2**. Look at the next **2 verses**. “**And all the believers were together and had everything in common and selling their possessions and good, they gave to anyone as he had need**”.

Now, that is a pretty good work out for baby believers. Brand new Christians, to teach them straight away, you are part of a spiritual family and God has blessed you, so you can bless others. That’s why we take up an offering every week.

Let me finish by saying this. I am not saying work **FOR** your salvation; I’m saying work **OUT** your salvation because there is a difference. So, you come to learn God’s word, you pray about it, you have fellowship with other Christians to help you grow, and you always be remembering the cross.