



A 4-WEEK SERIES FROM ROMANS ON

SPIRITUAL HABITS

FROM OUR ANNUAL *TEACHING STRATEGY*

BY NIKOMAS PEREZ



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ABOUT THIS SERIES

If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS SERIES AT A GLANCE

WEEK 1

To begin this series, we'll introduce students to Paul and the book of Romans, along with a few more people who made commitments to follow Jesus: Andrew, Peter, and Mary Magdalene

- **THE BIG IDEA:** You can stretch your faith with a commitment.
- **THE BIBLE:** Romans 5:6-8, 6:1-4; Matthew 4:18-20; Luke 24:1-10; Philippians 3:13-14
- **THE BUILDING BLOCKS:** Activity, Poll, Story, Reflection, Response, Discussion

WEEK 2

This week, we'll challenge students to create a new habit or two that helps their faith grow — habits that help them love God more, and help them love others too.

- **THE BIG IDEA:** You can stretch your faith by starting something new.
- **THE BIBLE:** Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; II Peter 1:5-8; I Thessalonians 3:12-13
- **THE BUILDING BLOCKS:** Activity, Video, Story, Object Lesson, Reflection, Response, Discussion

WEEK 3

This week, we'll challenge students to break a bad habit by letting go of something that's holding them back from growing in their faith.

- **THE BIG IDEA:** You can stretch your faith by letting something go.
- **THE BIBLE:** Romans 12:1-2, 16-21; Romans 8:13-14
- **THE BUILDING BLOCKS:** Question, Activity, Story, Poll, Video, Reflection, Response, Discussion

WEEK 4

To close this series, we'll remind students that even when they feel like they've failed God or themselves, their weakness is a gift and a chance to grow.

- **THE BIG IDEA:** You can stretch your faith even when you fail.
- **THE BIBLE:** Romans 7:18-25; II Corinthians 12:7-10; John 21:15-19
- **THE BUILDING BLOCKS:** Question, Video, Object Lesson, Story, Response, Prayer, Discussion

HOW TO PROGRAM FOR THIS SERIES

Outside of your teaching time, we have a few programming ideas to help this series really come to life – everything from how to **design your room**, to which **games to play**, to what **music to play and sing**.

ROOM DESIGN

For this series, we’re going to stretch some things! We’ll stretch fabric to create the backdrop and stretch rubber bands to create string art that can be used however you’d like.

To create the stretched fabric backdrop, you’ll need stretchy fabric (like spandex or lycra) in red, yellow, and orange, [grommets](#), [paracord](#), and weights or cinder blocks. Cut the fabric into large triangles (or any shape you’d like), add a grommet to each corner, and thread the paracord through the grommets, and stretch each corner to an anchor point. If you’re struggling to find existing anchor points in your room (like rafters or truss), create your own with weights or cinder blocks, by building a basic wooden frame and painting it black, or by adding sturdy hooks to your walls or ceiling.

To create the “Stretch” letters, you’ll need white [styrofoam](#) or [coroplast](#) (one sheet per letter) and a [craft knife](#). Use a projector and the series graphics

provided in your downloads to trace the letters of the series title onto the styrofoam or coroplast. Use the craft knife to cut them out. If you’re using 2” styrofoam, the letters will be able to stand on their own, but glue them to a base to prevent them from falling over. If you’re using coroplast, you’ll need to brace each letter with a tall triangle-shaped piece of coroplast, cut out of the scraps and glued or taped to the back of each letter. Glue each letter (with its brace) to a base to prevent them from falling over.

To create the string art, you’ll need a piece of black wood, [nails](#), and [rubber bands](#) in red, orange, and yellow. The sizes and dimensions of your supplies is up to you. You can create a large piece of wall art that’s several feet wide, or you can create a smaller version to label the area where students will drop off their “My Stretch” commitment cards each week. If you’ve never made string art before, [here’s a tutorial](#) – but use rubber bands instead of string.





GAMES by Jeremiah Herring & Tyler Grant

If you have a designated time for games before your worship and teaching time, we have a few suggestions for games you can play . . .

- [That's a Stretch](#)
- [Total Team Twister](#)
- [Yoga Bear](#)
- [Across the Stretch](#)

To go along with this series' theme of **stretching your faith**, all of the games we've suggested for this series have to do with stretching! To get the instructions and graphics for each game, click the links or visit the Games section of your Grow Students dashboard.



MUSIC by Libby Frees & Erica Mason

In addition to any music you might see woven throughout your teaching time, you'll probably want to have a time of worship with your students.

Here are a few worship songs that tie into this month's theme of **spiritual habits** by focusing on themes like commitment, growth, and worship.

- **"No Matter How Long It Takes"** (Cross Point Music)
- **"New Wine"** (Hillsong Worship)
- **"You Keep on Getting Better"** (Maverick City Music)
- **"Open Space"** (Housefires)
- **"Be Still"** (Hillsong Worship)
- **"Run to the Father"** (Cody Carnes)
- **"Build My Life"** (Housefires)
- **"Raise a Hallelujah"** (Bethel Music)
- **"Wide Open"** (North Point Worship)

For more worship song suggestions, check out our [Spotify worship playlist](#). It's updated regularly with our favorite current worship music!

And if you want to sing or sample a non-worship song or two (maybe as an opener, a closer, a bonus song during your program), try some of these . . .

- **"Meditate"** (Natalie Lauren)
- **"Borrow** (One Day at a Time)" (Josh Wilson)
- **"You Lead"** (Jamie Grace)
- **"Higher"** (Jor'dan Armstrong)
- **"I Surrender"** (Vrose)
- **"No Regrets"** (Erica Mason)
- **"Come to the Table"** (Sidewalk Prophets)
- **"Back Soon"** (IK Phew)

For more fun (and clean) song suggestions, check out our [Spotify background playlists](#). They're updated regularly with some of our favorites!

HOW TO PREP FOR THIS SERIES

WHAT TO GET

If you want to try all of our suggestions for this series, here's what you'll need to buy, borrow, Google, or dig for in your storage closet . . .

WEEK 1:

- The video ["Church Aerobics" by Shama Mrema and After School Program](#)
- **OPTIONAL:** An adult leader dressed in workout gear, sweatbands for every student
- A worship song like "Real Thing," by Maverick City Music

WEEK 2:

- A stretchy prize like [Silly Putty](#) or [slime](#)
- Images or videos of stretchy people, toys, or fictional characters, like [Stretch Armstrong](#), [Elastigirl](#), [Garry Turner](#) (Guinness World Record holder), or a [contortionist](#)
- Sticky notes
- Markers
- A tall board or blank wall
- A [bicycle inner-tube](#)
- Instrumental music

WEEK 3:

- 20 [disposable cups](#)
- [Rubber bands](#)
- [Permanent markers](#)
- [This video clip](#) from the movie Gravity
- [Wide rubber bands](#)
- [Ultra fine-tipped permanent markers](#)
- A worship song like "Be Still," by Hillsong Worship

WEEK 4:

- [This video of stretcher fails](#), or something like it
- Someone who can solve a Rubik's Cube, or a brief video of someone solving a Rubik's Cube, [like this one](#)
- [This video](#) of the Brownlee brothers
- Survey handouts provided in your Week 4 folder

EVERY WEEK:

- The Stretch Commitment Cards provided
- Card stock
- Pens
- A box or bucket

WHAT TO MAKE

WEEK 1:

- **OPTIONAL:** Recruit a volunteer to dress in workout gear and lead the group stretch.

WEEK 2:

- Recruit an athlete to interview live, or film and edit a simple video interview in advance.

WEEK 3:

- Set up the table and supplies for Bad Habit Shoot-Out.

WEEK 4:

- **OPTIONAL:** Learn to solve a Rubik's cube, recruit a student who can solve a Rubik's cube, or find a video of someone solving a Rubik's cube.

EVERY WEEK:

- Print one Stretch Commitment Card for every four students. Cut each handout into quarters.

WHAT TO CUSTOMIZE

You know your students better than we do, so there are probably some things you'd like to change about this series before you start teaching. Here's what you'll need to update if you make changes . . .

- **TEACHING:** Add your own stories, jokes, and any pop culture references that make sense for your group. You can edit each message using the Word documents provided or the [Grow Message Builder](#).
- **SMALL GROUP:** If you make any changes to your teaching, make sure your small group questions reflect those changes. You can edit these using the Word documents provided.
- **APP:** If you make changes to your teaching or small group questions, don't forget to update your content in the [Grow App](#) for your team!
- **GRAPHICS:** We've provided graphics in your [Graphics & Video folder](#) already, but we've also provided a blank slide in case you need to make your own.
- **EMAILS:** Customize and send the [volunteer and parent emails](#) we've provided for this series.

WHAT TO COMMUNICATE

To make sure your students, volunteers, and parents are in the loop . . .

- **STUDENTS:** Throughout the month, post the [Graphics & Video](#) we've provided on social media, like the Big Idea images and Bumper Video. Post the [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) we've provided or use the One-Minute Sermon Scripts to film a recap video each week and post it on social media.
- **PARENTS:** Before you begin teaching this series, send parents the [Parent Email](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). After each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to parents online. You can also copy and paste the social media posts we've included in your [Parent Communication Guide](#).
- **VOLUNTEERS:** Before you teach each week of this series, send volunteers the weekly [Volunteer Emails](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). Before each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to volunteers online. You can also copy and paste the social media posts we've included in your [Volunteer Communication Guide](#).

For a more in-depth digital communication strategy, **customize the [Social Media Plan spreadsheet](#)** we've provided. And hey! When you post on social media, **don't forget to use the [#growcurriculum](#) hashtag** to share your ideas and stories with our team and with other churches who are using Grow!

HOW TO HACK THIS SERIES

Every ministry is different. Whether you're teaching middle schoolers, high schoolers, teenagers with special needs, or all three, here's how to hack this series to fit your unique and diverse audience.

HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS by Heather Kenison

- **GIVE PLENTY OF REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES:** Remember, your middle schoolers will sometimes struggle with abstract concepts, and "stretching your faith" might be one of them. To help them make sense of this, pack as many tangible real-life examples (preferably stories from your, or your volunteers', middle school years) into your messages as possible. These personal stories and examples will help your middle schoolers translate what it might look like to make a commitment to God in their own life.
- **WEEK 1: POINT YOUR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS TOWARD CONFIRMATION.** If your church practices Confirmation, this is another series that could help you point your middle schoolers toward Confirmation. Because Confirmation is about making a commitment to God and to the local church, this is an easy tie-in for Week 1.
- **WEEK 2: GIVE SOME STRETCHY GIVEAWAYS.** Consider giving the winner of your stretch contest a [Stretch Armstrong figure!](#) During your discussion times, you might want to consider giving every student a [stretchy man](#) toy to fidget with.
- **WEEK 3: GIVE EXTRA RUBBER BAND INSTRUCTIONS.** When you give students rubber bands (either for the game or the Rubber Band Reminders activity), remind them to not snap them at each other! If you're worried, try giving them silicone bracelets, paper wristbands, or slap bracelets as a take-home instead of the rubber bands. Whatever you choose for your bracelets, encourage your middle schoolers to wear them all week long, and don't forget to check in the following week to see how their habits went.
- **WEEK 4: COMPLETE THE STRETCH COMMITMENT CARDS IN GROUPS.** On the final week of this series, your middle schoolers may want to make a commitment, but struggle to know which commitment to make. To help them with that, consider breaking into small groups (with a trusted adult in each group) to complete the cards together. This will give students a chance to ask for help, express questions, and get feedback from an adult.

HACKS FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS by Irene Cho

- **EXPLORE MOTIVATIONS, NOT JUST BEHAVIOR.** In this series, we challenge students to take action, make commitments, and adjust their behavior because we know that, in many cases, adjusting our habits will impact our hearts and minds. But, of course, following Jesus isn't a "to-do list" or a code of conduct. Since your high schoolers are capable of handling more complexity, abstraction, and nuance than your middle schoolers, you may want to explore this idea further by . . .
 - Discussing the difference between making commitments because you want to grow in your faith and making commitments because of guilt, fear, or self-righteousness.
 - Encouraging students to examine the reasons why they have felt either motivated or unmotivated to make or follow through on commitments to God.
 - Including more examples of how a growing faith may not always be visible right away — you can stretch your faith while processing things internally, and not only through external actions.
- **WEEK 1: REMIND HIGH SCHOOLERS THAT FAITH IS NOT ABOUT PERFECTION.** It's great to encourage students to make commitments to God, but we must always balance that encouragement with reassurance that growing in your faith is a life-long journey and not a one-time decision. Research shows that reward-based learning is much more effective than a punitive system, so work hard to highlight the joy that comes from following Jesus, rather than instilling fear or guilt about struggling, failing, or not following through on their commitments to God.
- **WEEK 2: REMEMBER THAT TEENAGERS ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY SELF-CENTERED.** Teenagers aren't jerks — their brains during this phase are still learning how to practice empathy, compassion, and selflessness. So when you encourage students to develop new habits that include and care for others, be sensitive to the reality that this will be difficult for them, and that's okay. It won't always feel natural, and it may not come easily, but the more they "stretch" their awareness of others and their needs, the easier it will become.
- **WEEK 3: REMEMBER THAT BREAKING BAD HABITS WON'T COME EASILY FOR THEM.** The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that helps us make decisions, control our impulses, and predict the consequences of our actions — but in high schoolers, this part of the brain is still developing. They may be willing to break a bad habit, but their physiology may make this very difficult for them. You may want to tell your students this! Let them know that breaking habits isn't easy for anyone, try to defuse any shame they might be feeling about their bad habits, and encourage them to rely on others to help them through it — including professional therapists or counselors, when appropriate.
- **WEEK 4: LET STUDENTS KNOW THAT DOUBT DOES NOT EQUAL FAILURE.** Students may feel like their questions, doubts, or frustrations about their faith or the church are a sign of failure or lack of commitment, but this is your opportunity to help them see doubt differently. Research from Fuller Youth Institute shows how essential doubt and questions are in the process of faith formation! Encourage your students that curiosity, exploration, and discussion are welcome and encouraged, because they are essential to their journey of deepening their faith and relationship with God.

HACKS FOR KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS by Sunny Brown

- **USE DIVERSE METAPHORS FOR "STRETCHING."** If you have students in your ministry who have limited movement or physical disabilities, be extra cautious with using metaphors that have to do with movement or fitness. This series has already been cautious not to imply that strong, thin, or typically-abled bodies are superior, but be extra careful not to add these kinds of statements or implications into your teaching. Instead, "stretch" yourself to be even more inclusive by using metaphors that don't have to do with physical movement, like stretching your mind to understand a new concept or stretching your heart to be kind when it's difficult.
- **PROVIDE A BUDDY DURING THE REFLECTION TIMES.** If any of your students struggle with writing during your times of reflection, pair them with a buddy who can talk with them or write for them. If you're concerned a student may feel singled out, have all of your students break into pairs or groups for the reflection times each week.
- **WEEK 1: ADAPT THE GROUP STRETCH ACTIVITY.** If you have students who use wheelchairs or have other physical limitations, do this activity with everyone seated, challenging them to adapt the movements from their chairs. Or skip the video and give a new set of group stretches, like . . .
 - Stretch your eyes as wide as they'll go.
 - Stretch your eyebrows as high as you can.
 - Stretch your ears.
 - Puff out your cheeks and see how far they'll stretch.
- **WEEK 2: INTERVIEW SOMEONE WHO IS NOT AN ATHLETE.** To incorporate a diverse "stretching" metaphor into this week, interview someone instead of, or in addition to, the athlete we suggested. You could interview anyone who had to "stretch" their mind or their self-discipline to learn a new skill, create a new habit, or solve a big problem.
- **WEEKS 3 & 4: ENABLE CLOSED CAPTIONING ON YOUR VIDEO CLIP.** It's a simple adjustment, but a very important one for students with hearing impairments!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nikomas is a Teaching Pastor at Harvester Christian Church in St. Louis, Missouri where he leads the staff and preaches on the weekend. Prior to that Nikomas spent 15 years in youth ministry, and loved every second of it.

He prioritizes student leadership and measures growth by the impact that student leadership is making. Nikomas speaks at conferences, camps, and retreats. He loves connecting with and listening to young pastors over coffee.

Nikomas and his wife Rachel see their home as their most crucial youth ministry, filled with a high school daughter, a middle school daughter, and a kindergarten son.

If you'd like to chat with Nikomas about youth ministry, church leadership, or St. Louis Cardinals baseball, reach out! He would love to connect with you!

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HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS: Heather Kenison.

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HACKS FOR KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Sunny Brown.

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WEEK 1

SERMON GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith with a commitment.

THE BIBLE

Romans 5:6-8, 6:1-4; Matthew 4:18-20;
Luke 24:1-10; Philippians 3:13-14

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Group Stretch with Shama (Church Aerobics)

- We're in a new series called *Stretch*, so what better way to kick it off than with a group stretch?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play the video "[Church Aerobics](#)" by Shama Mrema and After School Program and invite your students to either watch from their seats or stand up and follow along with the moves. If you'd like, you can ask an adult leader to show up in costume, ready to lead the group stretch from the front of the room. And if you're feeling extra motivated, try handing out sweatbands to all of your students – you could even have them embroidered with your ministry logo or the word "stretch."*

DISCUSSION | How flexible are you?

- I doubt anyone is going to wake up sore tomorrow because of that "work out," but just in case, here's my advice: stretch. Stretching before and after a workout helps your muscles stay flexible.
- Turn to your neighbor and answer this question: **On a scale of "telephone pole" to "silly putty," how flexible are you?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give students a few moments to discuss with a neighbor. After 60 seconds, ask a few students to share their answers.*
- Some people are born more naturally flexible than others, but even those of you who think you are as flexible as a brick wall could become more flexible with practice. If you want to become a more flexible person, you need to start stretching.
- Stretching can be difficult, or even painful, when you're just getting started. But if you commit to stretching regularly, it gets easier and you get more flexible. It might even improve your health!

POLL | Have you ever . . . ?

- I did a little research about stretching and do you know what I learned? The benefits of stretching go far beyond increasing flexibility!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read each of the following scenarios one at a time. Each time, encourage students to either raise their hand or stand if they've experienced it.*
- Have you ever . . .
 - **Had a headache?** Stretching can increase blood flow to your brain and relieve many types of headaches.
 - **Felt stressed?** Stretching is a great stress-reliever, no matter what is causing your stress.
 - **Slouched your shoulders?** Stretching can strengthen your back and abdominal muscles so it's easier to stand or sit up straight.
 - **Had gas?** Stretching can help with that too! Seriously.

IMAGINE YOUR FAITH AS A MUSCLE

- We've talked a lot about our bodies, but now let's talk about our faith. If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Shins? Toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place?
- Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch. No matter how far (or not-so-far) you think your faith can stretch right now, if you want your faith to grow, you're going to need to stretch it.
- This month, we're going to challenge ourselves to stretch our faith together. It might be fun. It might be challenging. It will definitely be worthwhile! But here's the key: whether it's your body or your faith, **stretching only works if you commit to actually doing it.**

***SO WHAT?** Why does it matter to God and to us?*

STORY | Talk about a time you failed to follow through on a commitment.

- I've learned that no matter what goal I'm trying to achieve, commitment is an essential part of the process.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a story (or ask a student or volunteer to share a story) about a time when you jumped into a difficult activity with a lot of enthusiasm, but eventually failed to follow through with your commitment. You might talk about signing up for a gym membership, joining a club or team, or learning a new skill. Be sure to emphasize how much you wanted results, but didn't commit to the process.*
- Many of us treat our faith this same way. We want results, but we don't want to commit to regularly doing the work that would stretch our faith. We get excited about following Jesus, but after a few days, weeks, or months, our commitment decreases along with our excitement.

SCRIPTURE | Romans 5:6-8

- In Scripture, we can learn a lot about how to stretch our own faith from the stories and words of the Jesus-followers who have gone before us. One of those people is someone we've talked

about before: Paul, a guy who experienced a major life-change when he met Jesus.

- Paul used to be so opposed to Christianity that he was responsible for threatening, arresting, imprisoning, and even killing many early followers of Jesus.
- But when Paul met Jesus, everything changed. He turned away from what he used to believe about Jesus and quickly became one of the most well-known leaders of the early Church.
- Paul's life changed almost immediately because of Jesus. But unlike my story that I shared with you, Paul didn't fail to follow through on his new commitment. Paul committed to following Jesus with his whole life, and then he wrote letters to his fellow Jesus-followers to help them do the same.
- One of the letters Paul wrote was to a group of Christians in Rome that we now call the book of Romans. The goal of this letter was to explain that salvation could only be found through Jesus.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 5:6–8.*

SCRIPTURE | Romans 6:1–4

- Paul wanted the Romans to understand that Jesus could save them from their sin — their mistakes, failures, and rebellion against God. But Paul also wanted to make sure the Romans understood that salvation isn't just about eternity. It's about right now!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 6:1–4. As you teach, consider taking a moment to explain your church's understanding and approach to baptism.*
- Paul is asking, "Now that you know Jesus, do you want things to stay the same? Do you want to keep struggling with the same stuff? Or do you want to stretch and experience a faith that is growing and getting stronger?"
- Paul didn't pretend it would always be easy. Being "baptized into Jesus' death" doesn't exactly sound fun. But just like Jesus made a commitment to us (to die for us), Paul challenges us to make a commitment to Him (to die to ourselves and live for Him).

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 4:18–20

- Throughout Scripture, we see many people that made commitments to turn away from their old lives and start new ones following Jesus.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Matthew 4:18–20.*
- Peter and Andrew had normal lives and secure careers as fishermen, but everything changed when they committed to following Jesus.
 - You might think it takes a lot of faith to drop everything and follow Jesus, but this was just the first of many moments for Peter and Andrew that would stretch their faith. They made a commitment, and then they spent the rest of their lives living it out.
 - Years later, Peter and Andrew became apostles of the early Church, sharing the good news of Jesus despite dangerous circumstances. Peter even became one of the most important figures in the entire history of the Church!
 - That's a big deal, and it all started with this one commitment.

SCRIPTURE | Luke 24:1–10

- Mary Magdalene was a woman who committed to following Jesus after He changed her life. But while it was probably fun and exciting to follow Jesus when He was healing people and telling stories, it got a lot harder when Jesus was imprisoned and eventually killed.
- But Mary was committed to Jesus — so committed that she stayed close to Him, even after He died. While many of the men who followed Jesus fled and went into hiding after His death, Mary went to Jesus' tomb to prepare and honor His body.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Luke 24:1–10.*
- Because of her commitment to Jesus, even in His death, she was the first person to see Jesus alive again and the first person to share the resurrection story with others!

STORY | Share the names of people in your group who made commitments to follow Jesus.

- Scripture is filled with stories of people whose faith was strong and who did big things for God. So is our community!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Briefly list some of the names of people in the room, or in your larger church community, who made commitments to follow Jesus and are living for Him today. Share a detail about their life, faith, or impact as you list them.*
- For thousands of years, God has been helping people like you and me stretch their faith. For the next few weeks, we'll talk about a few of the ways we can do that, but it all starts here: like Paul, Andrew, Peter, and Mary, **you can stretch your faith with a commitment.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

REFLECTION | Stretch Commitment Card

- So do you want your faith to grow? Do you want it to get stronger? Ten years from now, do you want to . . .
 - Follow Jesus?
 - Love God more than you do today?
 - Love people more than you do today?
 - Make a lasting impact in the world?
- To reach our goals ten years from now, we have to start with a commitment today — a commitment to stretch and keep stretching.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder, and place one, along with a pen, under each seat. Let students know that in every week of this series, you'll be challenging them to make a commitment to "stretch" their faith in a new way. Before asking them to complete their cards, explain each option.*
- Every week of this series, I'm going to ask you to make one of five "stretch" commitments. This week, which stretch will you commit to doing?

- **SHOW UP.** To start, maybe you'll commit to showing up next week (or even for the next three weeks) to listen, discuss, and consider how God might want your faith to be stretched this year. The first step toward a stronger body isn't a two-hour spin class — it's walking into the gym. (Well, and paying your gym membership fee. We won't charge you one of those here.)
- **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you've never made a commitment to follow Jesus before, today might be a great day to start. Or maybe you made a commitment to Jesus once before, but recently your excitement has faded and you're having a tough time keeping your commitment going. If that's you, today's the day to get back in the game! No matter how many times we forget our commitments to Jesus, He never forgets His commitment to us. He's always waiting for you to come back.
- **LOVE GOD.** Maybe you already love God, and you're pretty committed to following Jesus, but you want to grow in your relationship with God. Maybe you want to spend more time with God or are tired of struggling with the same mistakes over and over again. We'll talk more about how we can do this in the coming weeks, but today you can commit to growing in your love for God.
- **LOVE OTHERS.** Maybe your relationship with God doesn't feel like the problem, but you could really learn how to love other people better! After all, Jesus said in many different ways that if we're going to love God well, we have to love each other well. Maybe the best way for you to stretch your faith right now is to ask God for the help you need to care more about others or to love someone you struggle to love.
- **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not ready to make any of these commitments right now, that's okay! If you have questions or doubts, or you want to know more about why so many people in this room have decided to follow Jesus, this is a safe place for those questions. You may not find every answer you're looking for, but there might be something new for you to discover.

RESPONSE | My Stretch

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Have a few cardboard boxes spread around the room, or one long box at the center of the room, labeled with the words "My Stretch." Each week, give students an opportunity to place their cards in the box as confirmation of the commitment they decide to make each week. You can do this quickly by asking students to drop their cards on their way out, or you can draw this out by playing an on-theme worship song while students pray, write, reflect, and turn in their cards. For this week, we suggest the song "[Real Thing](#)," by [Maverick City Music](#).*
- Whether you've never made a commitment to Jesus before, or you've made commitments but haven't followed through, every day (including today) is a new opportunity to start.
- If you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith with a commitment.**

WEEK 1

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

STRETCH



If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS WEEK

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith with a commitment.

THE BIBLE

Romans 5:6-8, 6:1-4; Matthew 4:18-20;
Luke 24:1-10; Philippians 3:13-14

- On a scale of "telephone pole" to "silly putty," how flexible are you?
- What are some commitments that are easy to keep? Which ones are difficult?
- Have you ever jumped into a new commitment and followed through? What motivated you to stay committed?
- Do you know anyone whose life was changed because of Jesus? Tell us about them.
- What are some of the qualities of Paul, Peter, Andrew, and Mary that made it possible for them to make a commitment to Jesus?
- Why do you think some people's lives are immediately changed by Jesus, while others' lives are changed more gradually, or not at all?
- Read Philippians 3:13–14. When we're making commitments to follow Jesus, why do you think Paul says it's important to forget about what's behind us?
- What are some commitments we can make to stretch our faith?
- Have you ever made a commitment to God before? How is your commitment going, and why?
- What commitment are you making to stretch your faith this week? What can our group do to help each other follow through on our commitments?

WEEK 1

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

for middle schoolers

STRETCH



If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS WEEK

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith with a commitment.

THE BIBLE

Romans 5:6-8, 6:1-4; Matthew 4:18-20;
Luke 24:1-10; Philippians 3:13-14

- On a scale of "telephone pole" to "silly putty," how flexible are you?
- What are some commitments that are easy to keep? Which ones are difficult?
- What are some of the qualities of Paul, Peter, Andrew, and Mary that made it possible for them to make a commitment to Jesus?
- Why do you think some people's lives are immediately changed by Jesus, while others' lives are changed more gradually, or not at all?
- Read Philippians 3:13-14. When we're making commitments to follow Jesus, why do you think Paul says it's important to forget about what's behind us?
- What commitment are you making to stretch your faith this week? What can our group do to help each other follow through on our commitments?



WEEK 1

HYBRID TEACHING GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus can redeem what's gone wrong.

THE BIBLE

Genesis 1:31, 3:17-18; Colossians 1:13-20;
Psalm 13:1-2

ACTIVITY | Group Stretch with Shama (Church Aerobics)

- We're in a new series called *Stretch*, so what better way to kick it off than with a group stretch?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Play the video "[Church Aerobics](#)" by Shama Mrema and After School Program and invite your students to either watch from their seats or stand up and follow along with the moves. If you'd like, you can ask an adult leader to show up in costume, ready to lead the group stretch from the front of the room. And if you're feeling extra motivated, try handing out sweatbands to all of your students — you could even have them embroidered with your ministry logo or the word "stretch."

DISCUSSION | How flexible are you?

- I doubt anyone is going to wake up sore tomorrow because of that "work out," but just in case, here's my advice: stretch. Stretching before and after a workout helps your muscles stay flexible.
- Turn to your neighbor and answer this question: **On a scale of "telephone pole" to "silly putty," how flexible are you?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give students a few moments to discuss with a neighbor. After 60 seconds, ask a few students to share their answers.
- Some people are born more naturally flexible than others, but even those of you who think you are as flexible as a brick wall could become more flexible with practice. If you want to become a more flexible person, you need to start stretching.
- Stretching can be difficult, or even painful, when you're just getting started. But if you commit to stretching regularly, it gets easier and you get more flexible. It might even improve your health!

POLL | Have you ever . . . ?

- I did a little research about stretching and do you know what I learned? The benefits of stretching go far beyond increasing flexibility!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read each of the following scenarios one at a time. Each time, encourage students to either raise their hand or stand if they've experienced it.*
- Have you ever . . .
 - **Had a headache?** Stretching can increase blood flow to your brain and relieve many types of headaches.
 - **Felt stressed?** Stretching is a great stress-reliever, no matter what is causing your stress.
 - **Slouched your shoulders?** Stretching can strengthen your back and abdominal muscles so it's easier to stand or sit up straight.
 - **Had gas?** Stretching can help with that too! Seriously.

IMAGINE YOUR FAITH AS A MUSCLE

- We've talked a lot about our bodies, but now let's talk about our faith. If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Shins? Toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place?
- Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch. No matter how far (or not-so-far) you think your faith can stretch right now, if you want your faith to grow, you're going to need to stretch it.
- This month, we're going to challenge ourselves to stretch our faith together. It might be fun. It might be challenging. It will definitely be worthwhile! But here's the key: whether it's your body or your faith, **stretching only works if you commit to actually doing it.**

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- **What are some commitments that are easy to keep? Which ones are difficult?**
- ★ **Have you ever jumped into a new commitment and followed through? What motivated you to stay committed?**

STORY | Talk about a time you failed to follow through on a commitment.

- I've learned that no matter what goal I'm trying to achieve, commitment is an essential part of the process.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a story (or ask a student or volunteer to share a story) about a time when you jumped into a difficult activity with a lot of enthusiasm, but eventually failed to follow through with your commitment. You might talk about signing up for a gym membership, joining a club*

or team, or learning a new skill. Be sure to emphasize how much you wanted results, but didn't commit to the process.

- Many of us treat our faith this same way. We want results, but we don't want to commit to regularly doing the work that would stretch our faith. We get excited about following Jesus, but after a few days, weeks, or months, our commitment decreases along with our excitement.

SCRIPTURE | Romans 5:6-8

- In Scripture, we can learn a lot about how to stretch our own faith from the stories and words of the Jesus-followers who have gone before us. One of those people is someone we've talked about before: Paul, a guy who experienced a major life-change when he met Jesus.
 - Paul used to be so opposed to Christianity that he was responsible for threatening, arresting, imprisoning, and even killing many early followers of Jesus.
 - But when Paul met Jesus, everything changed. He turned away from what he used to believe about Jesus and quickly became one of the most well-known leaders of the early Church.
 - Paul's life changed almost immediately because of Jesus. But unlike my story that I shared with you, Paul didn't fail to follow through on his new commitment. Paul committed to following Jesus with his whole life, and then he wrote letters to his fellow Jesus-followers to help them do the same.
- One of the letters Paul wrote was to a group of Christians in Rome that we now call the book of Romans. The goal of this letter was to explain that salvation could only be found through Jesus.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 5:6–8.*

SCRIPTURE | Romans 6:1–4

- Paul wanted the Romans to understand that Jesus could save them from their sin — their mistakes, failures, and rebellion against God. But Paul also wanted to make sure the Romans understood that salvation isn't just about eternity. It's about right now!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 6:1–4. As you teach, consider taking a moment to explain your church's understanding and approach to baptism.*
- Paul is asking, "Now that you know Jesus, do you want things to stay the same? Do you want to keep struggling with the same stuff? Or do you want to stretch and experience a faith that is growing and getting stronger?"
- Paul didn't pretend it would always be easy. Being "baptized into Jesus' death" doesn't exactly sound fun. But just like Jesus made a commitment to us (to die for us), Paul challenges us to make a commitment to Him (to die to ourselves and live for Him).

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 4:18–20

- Throughout Scripture, we see many people that made commitments to turn away from their old lives and start new ones following Jesus.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Matthew 4:18–20.*
- Peter and Andrew had normal lives and secure careers as fishermen, but everything changed when they committed to following Jesus.

- You might think it takes a lot of faith to drop everything and follow Jesus, but this was just the first of many moments for Peter and Andrew that would stretch their faith. They made a commitment, and then they spent the rest of their lives living it out.
- Years later, Peter and Andrew became apostles of the early Church, sharing the good news of Jesus despite dangerous circumstances. Peter even became one of the most important figures in the entire history of the Church!
- That's a big deal, and it all started with this one commitment.

SCRIPTURE | Luke 24:1–10

- Mary Magdalene was a woman who committed to following Jesus after He changed her life. But while it was probably fun and exciting to follow Jesus when He was healing people and telling stories, it got a lot harder when Jesus was imprisoned and eventually killed.
- But Mary was committed to Jesus — so committed that she stayed close to Him, even after He died. While many of the men who followed Jesus fled and went into hiding after His death, Mary went to Jesus' tomb to prepare and honor His body.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Luke 24:1–10.*
- Because of her commitment to Jesus, even in His death, she was the first person to see Jesus alive again and the first person to share the resurrection story with others!

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- ★ **Do you know anyone whose life was changed because of Jesus? Tell us about them.**
- **What are some of the qualities of Paul, Peter, Andrew, and Mary that made it possible for them to make a commitment to Jesus?**
- **Why do you think some people's lives are immediately changed by Jesus, while others' lives are changed more gradually, or not at all?**

STORY | Share the names of people in your group who made commitments to follow Jesus.

- Scripture is filled with stories of people whose faith was strong and who did big things for God. So is our community!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Briefly list some of the names of people in the room, or in your larger church community, who made commitments to follow Jesus and are living for Him today. Share a detail about their life, faith, or impact as you list them.*
- For thousands of years, God has been helping people like you and me stretch their faith. For the next few weeks, we'll talk about a few of the ways we can do that, but it all starts here: like Paul, Andrew, Peter, and Mary, **you can stretch your faith with a commitment.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

REFLECTION | Stretch Commitment Card

- So do you want your faith to grow? Do you want it to get stronger? Ten years from now, do you want to . . .
 - Follow Jesus?
 - Love God more than you do today?
 - Love people more than you do today?
 - Make a lasting impact in the world?
- To reach our goals ten years from now, we have to start with a commitment today — a commitment to stretch and keep stretching.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder, and place one, along with a pen, under each seat. Let students know that in every week of this series, you'll be challenging them to make a commitment to "stretch" their faith in a new way. Before asking them to complete their cards, explain each option.*
- Every week of this series, I'm going to ask you to make one of five "stretch" commitments. This week, which stretch will you commit to doing?
 - **SHOW UP.** To start, maybe you'll commit to showing up next week (or even for the next three weeks) to listen, discuss, and consider how God might want your faith to be stretched this year. The first step toward a stronger body isn't a two-hour spin class — it's walking into the gym. (Well, and paying your gym membership fee. We won't charge you one of those here.)
 - **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you've never made a commitment to follow Jesus before, today might be a great day to start. Or maybe you made a commitment to Jesus once before, but recently your excitement has faded and you're having a tough time keeping your commitment going. If that's you, today's the day to get back in the game! No matter how many times we forget our commitments to Jesus, He never forgets His commitment to us. He's always waiting for you to come back.
 - **LOVE GOD.** Maybe you already love God, and you're pretty committed to following Jesus, but you want to grow in your relationship with God. Maybe you want to spend more time with God or are tired of struggling with the same mistakes over and over again. We'll talk more about how we can do this in the coming weeks, but today you can commit to growing in your love for God.
 - **LOVE OTHERS.** Maybe your relationship with God doesn't feel like the problem, but you could really learn how to love other people better! After all, Jesus said in many different ways that if we're going to love God well, we have to love each other well. Maybe the best way for you to stretch your faith right now is to ask God for the help you need to care more about others or to love someone you struggle to love.
 - **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not ready to make any of these commitments right now, that's okay! If you have questions or doubts, or you want to know more about why so many people in this room have decided to follow Jesus, this is a safe place for those questions. You may not find every answer you're looking for, but there might be something new for you to discover.

RESPONSE | My Stretch

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Have a few cardboard boxes spread around the room, or one long box at the center of the room, labeled with the words "My Stretch." Each week, give students an opportunity to place their cards in the box as confirmation of the commitment they decide to make each week. You can do this quickly by asking students to drop their cards on their way out, or you can draw this out by playing an on-theme worship song while students pray, write, reflect, and turn in their cards. For this week, we suggest the song "[Real Thing](#)," by [Maverick City Music](#).*
- Whether you've never made a commitment to Jesus before, or you've made commitments but haven't followed through, every day (including today) is a new opportunity to start.
- If you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith with a commitment.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- **Read Philippians 3:13–14. When we're making commitments to follow Jesus, why do you think Paul says it's important to forget about what's behind us?**
- ☆ **What are some commitments we can make to stretch our faith?**
- ☆ **Have you ever made a commitment to God before? How is your commitment going, and why?**
- **What commitment are you making to stretch your faith this week? What can our group do to help each other follow through on our commitments?**



**MY
STRETCH
STRETCH**

**I'M GOING TO
STRETCH MY FAITH BY:**

- SHOWING UP
- LOVING OTHERS
- FOLLOWING JESUS
- ASKING QUESTIONS
- LOVING GOD



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- LOVING GOD



WEEK 2

SERMON GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith by starting something new.

THE BIBLE

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; II Peter 1:5-8;
I Thessalonians 3:12-13

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | The Stretchiest Stretchy Person

- This month we're inviting you to stretch. Today I want to crown one person in this room as "The Stretchiest Stretchy Person." **Who thinks they are the stretchiest person here?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite at least three students to the front of the room to compete in a series of challenges, and then award a prize (like Silly Putty or slime) to the winner. Try having students compete in challenges like . . .*
 - *Touch your toes.*
 - *Lick your elbow.*
 - *Raise one eyebrow.*
 - *Wiggle your ears.*
 - *Touch your tongue to your nose.*
 - *Freestyle – show us your best stretch!*

VIDEO | Superhuman Stretchers

- We have some very flexible people in this room, but we'll probably never be as stretchy as this . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Show at least one image or video of very stretchy people, toys, or fictional characters, like [Stretch Armstrong](#), [Elastigirl](#), [Garry Turner](#) (Guinness World Record holder), or a [contortionist](#).*

STORY | An Interview with an Athlete

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your program, invite someone involved in a sport or physical activity that requires flexibility (like a gymnast, dancer, cheerleader, or fitness instructor) to be interviewed. You can interview them live or by filming a simple video on location in advance. Keep it fun and ask them questions about their sport or activity, like . . .
 - **How did you get started?**
 - **How flexible were you when you first began?**
 - **How did you get more flexible?**
 - **What's the most impressive thing you can physically do? Can you demonstrate?**

IMAGINE YOUR FAITH IS A MUSCLE

- We can learn a lot about faith from the way God designed our bodies. Just like your muscles, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it.
 - If all you can do right now is reach to your knees, that's okay! But if you ever want to stretch all the way to your toes, you'll need to start a new habit — like reaching a little further every day. That may not feel like much, but it will make a difference.
 - When it comes to our faith, the same thing is true. **God doesn't ask us to have superhuman flexibility from the beginning.** God just asks us to keep stretching a little more each day, and trust that transformation will happen.
- Last week, we said the first step in stretching our faith is making a commitment and sticking to it. Today, we'll see a second way we can stretch our faith so God can help us grow.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:1–2

- We talked about a guy named Paul last week. If you think it's amazing to see physical transformations take place (like before-and-after photos of body builders developing their muscles), you'll love Paul's story. No, he wasn't a body-builder — at least, I don't think so. But his "before-and-after" transformation was pretty amazing.
 - Before Paul met Jesus, he was one of the biggest enemies of the early followers of Jesus. He attacked, imprisoned, and even killed them.
 - After Paul met Jesus, he became one of the most influential leaders in the entire Jesus movement.
- If you remember from last week, Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in the city of Rome. We call it the book of Romans. In it, he wrote about how we find salvation through Jesus, and how God's salvation impacts not just our eternities, but our everyday lives too.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Romans 12:1–2.
- Transformation — that's the goal, Paul said! Following Jesus isn't just a prayer we pray once and then forget about. Following Jesus is about being totally transformed.

- As followers of Jesus, Paul said we shouldn't look or act like everyone else because God should be transforming us from the inside out.
- Only God can transform us, but there are some things we can do that make it easier for God's transformation to take place.

STORY | Talk about a time you began a new spiritual habit.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a story (or ask a student or volunteer to share a story) about a time when you adopted a new spiritual habit that led to transformation. This might be reading the Bible for a few minutes each day, waking up early to pray, or memorizing Scripture. Talk about how you developed that habit and what the results were.*
- When I started this new habit, it was hard to train my mind and body to adopt a new behavior. But over time, things changed.
 - My new habits not only got easier, but God began transforming me in brand new ways.
 - I learned that, while only God can transform me, I have a role to play in my own transformation.
- If I want my faith to grow, I might need to kick-start that transformation by starting a new habit or discipline.

ACTIVITY | Sticky Note Stretch (Part 1)

- **What are some habits that often help people's faith stretch, grow stronger, or transform?** Don't worry, you're not signing up to do all of these things! We're just brainstorming.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Use sticky notes and markers to brainstorm ways that people can stretch and grow their faith. Write down students' ideas and stick them to a wall or board, or ask students to write their own ideas and add them (for fun, make them "stretch" to place the sticky notes as high on the wall or board as possible). As you brainstorm, try to steer students toward sharing ideas that focus on either personal spiritual disciplines (reading the Bible, prayer, fasting) or answers related to church attendance or involvement.*

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:9–15

- Paul wanted his fellow Jesus-followers to be transformed by God. But what does that look like? After we allow God to renew our minds through the habits we just brainstormed, what should our lives look like?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 12:9–15.*
- Paul gives us a lot to think about, but let me give us a few highlights. A person who has been transformed by God does these three things:
 - **SERVE:** You figure out how God has gifted you, and then you use your gifts to take care of other people.
 - **LOVE:** You put other people before yourself (even the ones who are hard to love) and make sure they know they matter – to God and to you.
 - **SHARE:** You celebrate with people on the good days and cry with them when life is tough.
- But hang on! I told you a moment ago that when we let God transform us, then we become people who serve, love, and share. That's true. Only God has the power to transform us, but another thing is also true.

- Just like reading the Bible, praying, or going to church are all habits that kick-start our own transformation, choosing to serve, love, and share with others are also habits that can kick-start our own transformation.
- Paul didn't tell us to wait until we feel like loving, serving, or sharing with people. He just told us to do it! Why? Maybe it's because Paul knew that turning our faith into action would stretch our faith in new ways.

SCRIPTURE | II Peter 1:5–8

- Another important leader in the early church was a guy named Peter. Let's take a look at a letter Peter wrote around the same time that Paul was writing his letters.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read II Peter 1:5–8.*
- Peter told us we need to "add to" or "supplement" our faith in Jesus with something.
 - You may have heard the word "supplement" before — as in a dietary supplement that could help you grow healthier or stronger. Like vitamins!
 - It's hard to remember to take your vitamins as an adult, but kids' vitamins are awesome. They're usually colorful, taste like candy, and come in the shape of your favorite cartoon characters. Kids love them and parents love that they don't have to fight with their kids about taking their vitamins!
- Think about the things that Paul and Peter listed as supplements. When we "add" them to our faith, they can help stretch and grow our faith in new ways. But like vitamins, these supplements only work when we make it a habit to take them.

OBJECT LESSON | Bicycle Inner-Tube Stretch

- When we brainstormed ways to stretch our faith, we mostly came up with ideas that were all about us and our personal relationships with God. Those are all important habits we need to develop, but isn't it interesting that Paul and Peter encouraged us to build habits that are also about others?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, get a [bicycle inner tube](#) and have a few volunteers ready to help you with this demonstration. Begin your object lesson by placing the inner tube (representing your faith) around yourself and stretch it while you talk about the importance of developing personal spiritual habits. Then invite a volunteer to step inside the inner tube with you (arms folded over their chests). Continue adding volunteers until you can't fit anyone else inside the inner tube.*
- You can stretch your faith by starting a new habit that helps you connect with God, but you can stretch your faith even more by "adding" new habits that help you love others more. You might be surprised at how many people you can love, and how far loving people stretches your faith.
- If you want to stretch your faith, you can! When we start new habits (like spending more time with God, loving others better, or taking our vitamins), we grow. **You can stretch your faith by starting something new.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

ACTIVITY | Sticky Note Stretch (Part 2)

- We've already brainstormed some of the ways we can stretch our faith by getting closer to God, but now let's brainstorm some of the ways we can stretch our faith by loving others too.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Return to your sticky notes. Repeat the exercise but, this time, ask students to suggest habits that have to do with loving others, based on the passages of Scripture you read together.*

REFLECTION | Stretch Commitment Card

- I want to give you the opportunity to commit to stretching your faith again. Even if you filled this out last week, maybe you have a new commitment you want to make today – a commitment to start something new.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 2 folder, and place one, along with a pen, under each seat. Before asking students to complete their cards, explain each option.*
- Every week of this series, I'm asking you to make one of five "stretch" commitments. This week, which stretch will you commit to doing?
 - **SHOW UP.** To start, maybe you'll commit to showing up next week (or even for the next two weeks) to listen, discuss, and consider how God might want your faith to be stretched.
 - **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you've never made a commitment to follow Jesus before, today might be a great day to start.
 - **LOVE GOD.** Maybe you already love God, and you're pretty committed to following Jesus, but you want to grow in your relationship with God. Maybe you want to spend more time with God or are tired of struggling with the same mistakes over and over again. If that's you, maybe today is the day you "start something new" by starting a new habit that helps you connect more deeply and regularly with God.
 - **LOVE OTHERS.** Maybe your relationship with God doesn't feel like the problem, but you could really learn how to love other people better! Maybe you have a pretty close relationship with God, but now you need to "add to" your faith by starting a habit that helps you love others better.
 - **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not ready to make any of these commitments right now, that's okay! If you have questions or doubts, or you want to know more about why so many people in this room have decided to follow Jesus, this is a safe place for those questions. You may not find every answer you're looking for, but there might be something new for you to discover.

RESPONSE | My Stretch

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Have a few cardboard boxes spread around the room, or one long box at the center of the room, labeled with the words "My Stretch." Each week, give students an opportunity to place their cards in the box as confirmation of the commitment they decide to make each week. You can do this quickly by asking students to drop their cards on their way out, or you can draw this out by playing [instrumental music](#) or an on-theme worship song while students pray, write, reflect, and turn in their cards.*
- Only God can transform you, but you can kick-start that transformation by starting a new habit. Whether your new habit is about loving God, about loving others, or both, I hope you know that the smallest habits often have the biggest impact over time.
- If you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, remember that it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith by starting something new.**

WEEK 2

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

STRETCH



If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS WEEK

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith by starting something new.

THE BIBLE

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; II Peter 1:5-8;
I Thessalonians 3:12-13

- **Have you ever wished you could be more flexible? What would you do if you were?**
- **What's something you weren't always able to do? When and how did you start learning how to do it?**
- **If you follow Jesus, when did you start following Him? How has your faith stretched since then?**
- **If you were to make a plan for growing your faith, what habits would you include?**
- **How do you think loving others is connected to growing your faith?**
- **When our faith is growing, how should it change the way we love our family? Friends? Others?**
- **Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13. Why do you think Paul wanted people's love for each other to grow? If Paul were praying for our group, what do you think he would be praying for?**
- **We already brainstormed some habits that can help our faith grow. Which are you already practicing? Which are difficult for you to practice? Which would you like to start?**
- **This week, what's one new habit you're going to start in order to stretch your faith?**
- **How can our group help each other start or keep our new habits?**

WEEK 2

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

for middle schoolers

STRETCH

If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS WEEK

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith by starting something new.

THE BIBLE

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; II Peter 1:5-8;
I Thessalonians 3:12-13

- **Have you ever wished you could be more flexible? What would you do if you were?**
- **What's something you weren't always able to do? When and how did you start learning how to do it?**
- **If you follow Jesus, when did you start following Him? How has your faith stretched since then?**
- **When our faith is growing, how should it change the way we love our family? Friends? Others?**
- **Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13. Why do you think Paul wanted people's love for each other to grow? If Paul were praying for our group, what do you think he would be praying for?**
- **This week, what's one new habit you're going to start in order to stretch your faith?**



WEEK 2

HYBRID TEACHING GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith by starting something new.

THE BIBLE

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; II Peter 1:5-8;
I Thessalonians 3:12-13

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | The Stretchiest Stretchy Person

- This month we're inviting you to stretch. Today I want to crown one person in this room as "The Stretchiest Stretchy Person." **Who thinks they are the stretchiest person here?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite at least three students to the front of the room to compete in a series of challenges, and then award a prize (like Silly Putty or slime) to the winner. Try having students compete in challenges like . . .*
 - *Touch your toes.*
 - *Lick your elbow.*
 - *Raise one eyebrow.*
 - *Wiggle your ears.*
 - *Touch your tongue to your nose.*
 - *Freestyle – show us your best stretch!*

VIDEO | Superhuman Stretchers

- We have some very flexible people in this room, but we'll probably never be as stretchy as this . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Show at least one image or video of very stretchy people, toys, or fictional characters, like [Stretch Armstrong](#), [Elastigirl](#), [Garry Turner](#) (Guinness World Record holder), or a [contortionist](#).*

STORY | An Interview with an Athlete

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your program, invite someone involved in a sport or physical activity that requires flexibility (like a gymnast, dancer, cheerleader, or fitness instructor) to be interviewed. You can interview them live or by filming a simple video on location in advance. Keep it fun and ask them questions about their sport or activity, like . . .
 - **How did you get started?**
 - **How flexible were you when you first began?**
 - **How did you get more flexible?**
 - **What's the most impressive thing you can physically do? Can you demonstrate?**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share.
- **Have you ever wished you could be more flexible? What would you do if you were?**
- **What's something you weren't always able to do? When and how did you start learning how to do it?**

IMAGINE YOUR FAITH IS A MUSCLE

- We can learn a lot about faith from the way God designed our bodies. Just like your muscles, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it.
 - If all you can do right now is reach to your knees, that's okay! But if you ever want to stretch all the way to your toes, you'll need to start a new habit — like reaching a little further every day. That may not feel like much, but it will make a difference.
 - When it comes to our faith, the same thing is true. **God doesn't ask us to have superhuman flexibility from the beginning.** God just asks us to keep stretching a little more each day, and trust that transformation will happen.
- Last week, we said the first step in stretching our faith is making a commitment and sticking to it. Today, we'll see a second way we can stretch our faith so God can help us grow.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:1–2

- We talked about a guy named Paul last week. If you think it's amazing to see physical transformations take place (like before-and-after photos of body builders developing their muscles), you'll love Paul's story. No, he wasn't a body-builder — at least, I don't think so. But his "before-and-after" transformation was pretty amazing.
 - Before Paul met Jesus, he was one of the biggest enemies of the early followers of Jesus. He attacked, imprisoned, and even killed them.
 - After Paul met Jesus, he became one of the most influential leaders in the entire Jesus movement.

- If you remember from last week, Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in the city of Rome. We call it the book of Romans. In it, he wrote about how we find salvation through Jesus, and how God's salvation impacts not just our eternities, but our everyday lives too.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 12:1–2.*
- Transformation — that's the goal, Paul said! Following Jesus isn't just a prayer we pray once and then forget about. Following Jesus is about being totally transformed.
 - As followers of Jesus, Paul said we shouldn't look or act like everyone else because God should be transforming us from the inside out.
 - Only God can transform us, but there are some things we can do that make it easier for God's transformation to take place.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- **If you follow Jesus, when did you start following Him? How has your faith stretched since then?**
- ★ **If you were to make a plan for growing your faith, what habits would you include?**

STORY | Talk about a time you began a new spiritual habit.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a story (or ask a student or volunteer to share a story) about a time when you adopted a new spiritual habit that led to transformation. This might be reading the Bible for a few minutes each day, waking up early to pray, or memorizing Scripture. Talk about how you developed that habit and what the results were.*
- When I started this new habit, it was hard to train my mind and body to adopt a new behavior. But over time, things changed.
 - My new habits not only got easier, but God began transforming me in brand new ways.
 - I learned that, while only God can transform me, I have a role to play in my own transformation.
- If I want my faith to grow, I might need to kick-start that transformation by starting a new habit or discipline.

ACTIVITY | Sticky Note Stretch (Part 1)

- **What are some habits that often help people's faith stretch, grow stronger, or transform?** Don't worry, you're not signing up to do all of these things! We're just brainstorming.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Use sticky notes and markers to brainstorm ways that people can stretch and grow their faith. Write down students' ideas and stick them to a wall or board, or ask students to write their own ideas and add them (for fun, make them "stretch" to place the sticky notes as high on the wall or board as possible). As you brainstorm, try to steer students toward sharing ideas that focus on either personal spiritual disciplines (reading the Bible, prayer, fasting) or answers related to church attendance or involvement.*

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:9–15

- Paul wanted his fellow Jesus-followers to be transformed by God. But what does that look like? After we allow God to renew our minds through the habits we just brainstormed, what should our lives look like?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 12:9–15.*
- Paul gives us a lot to think about, but let me give us a few highlights. A person who has been transformed by God does these three things:
 - **SERVE:** You figure out how God has gifted you, and then you use your gifts to take care of other people.
 - **LOVE:** You put other people before yourself (even the ones who are hard to love) and make sure they know they matter — to God and to you.
 - **SHARE:** You celebrate with people on the good days and cry with them when life is tough.
- But hang on! I told you a moment ago that when we let God transform us, then we become people who serve, love, and share. That's true. Only God has the power to transform us, but another thing is also true.
 - Just like reading the Bible, praying, or going to church are all habits that kick-start our own transformation, choosing to serve, love, and share with others are also habits that can kick-start our own transformation.
 - Paul didn't tell us to wait until we feel like loving, serving, or sharing with people. He just told us to do it! Why? Maybe it's because Paul knew that turning our faith into action would stretch our faith in new ways.

SCRIPTURE | II Peter 1:5–8

- Another important leader in the early church was a guy named Peter. Let's take a look at a letter Peter wrote around the same time that Paul was writing his letters.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read II Peter 1:5–8.*
- Peter told us we need to "add to" or "supplement" our faith in Jesus with something.
 - You may have heard the word "supplement" before — as in a dietary supplement that could help you grow healthier or stronger. Like vitamins!
 - It's hard to remember to take your vitamins as an adult, but kids' vitamins are awesome. They're usually colorful, taste like candy, and come in the shape of your favorite cartoon characters. Kids love them and parents love that they don't have to fight with their kids about taking their vitamins!
- Think about the things that Paul and Peter listed as supplements. When we "add" them to our faith, they can help stretch and grow our faith in new ways. But like vitamins, these supplements only work when we make it a habit to take them.

OBJECT LESSON | Bicycle Inner-Tube Stretch

- When we brainstormed ways to stretch our faith, we mostly came up with ideas that were all about us and our personal relationships with God. Those are all important habits we need to develop, but isn't it interesting that Paul and Peter encouraged us to build habits that are also about others?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your program, get a [bicycle inner tube](#) and have a few volunteers ready to help you with this demonstration. Begin your object lesson by placing the inner tube (representing your faith) around yourself and stretch it while you talk about the importance of developing personal spiritual habits. Then invite a volunteer to step inside the inner tube with you (arms folded over their chests). Continue adding volunteers until you can't fit anyone else inside the inner tube.
- You can stretch your faith by starting a new habit that helps you connect with God, but you can stretch your faith even more by "adding" new habits that help you love others more. You might be surprised at how many people you can love, and how far loving people stretches your faith.
- If you want to stretch your faith, you can! When we start new habits (like spending more time with God, loving others better, or taking our vitamins), we grow. **You can stretch your faith by starting something new.**

***NOW WHAT?** What does God want us to do about it?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.
- ✪ **How do you think loving others is connected to growing your faith?**
- **When our faith is growing, how should it change the way we love our family? Friends? Others?**
- **Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13. Why do you think Paul wanted people's love for each other to grow? If Paul were praying for our group, what do you think he would be praying for?**

ACTIVITY | Sticky Note Stretch (Part 2)

- We've already brainstormed some of the ways we can stretch our faith by getting closer to God, but now let's brainstorm some of the ways we can stretch our faith by loving others too.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Return to your sticky notes. Repeat the exercise but, this time, ask students to suggest habits that have to do with loving others, based on the passages of Scripture you read together.

REFLECTION | Stretch Commitment Card

- I want to give you the opportunity to commit to stretching your faith again. Even if you filled this out last week, maybe you have a new commitment you want to make today – a commitment to start something new.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 2 folder, and place one, along with a pen, under each seat. Before asking students to complete their cards, explain each option.
- Every week of this series, I'm asking you to make one of five "stretch" commitments. This week, which stretch will you commit to doing?

- **SHOW UP.** To start, maybe you'll commit to showing up next week (or even for the next two weeks) to listen, discuss, and consider how God might want your faith to be stretched.
- **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you've never made a commitment to follow Jesus before, today might be a great day to start.
- **LOVE GOD.** Maybe you already love God, and you're pretty committed to following Jesus, but you want to grow in your relationship with God. Maybe you want to spend more time with God or are tired of struggling with the same mistakes over and over again. If that's you, maybe today is the day you "start something new" by starting a new habit that helps you connect more deeply and regularly with God.
- **LOVE OTHERS.** Maybe your relationship with God doesn't feel like the problem, but you could really learn how to love other people better! Maybe you have a pretty close relationship with God, but now you need to "add to" your faith by starting a habit that helps you love others better.
- **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not ready to make any of these commitments right now, that's okay! If you have questions or doubts, or you want to know more about why so many people in this room have decided to follow Jesus, this is a safe place for those questions. You may not find every answer you're looking for, but there might be something new for you to discover.

RESPONSE | My Stretch

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Have a few cardboard boxes spread around the room, or one long box at the center of the room, labeled with the words "My Stretch." Each week, give students an opportunity to place their cards in the box as confirmation of the commitment they decide to make each week. You can do this quickly by asking students to drop their cards on their way out, or you can draw this out by playing [instrumental music](#) or an on-theme worship song while students pray, write, reflect, and turn in their cards.*
- Only God can transform you, but you can kick-start that transformation by starting a new habit. Whether your new habit is about loving God, about loving others, or both, I hope you know that the smallest habits often have the biggest impact over time.
- If you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, remember that it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith by starting something new.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- ★ **We already brainstormed some habits that can help our faith grow. Which are you already practicing? Which are difficult for you to practice? Which would you like to start?**
- **This week, what's one new habit you're going to start in order to stretch your faith?**
- ★ **How can our group help each other start or keep our new habits?**



**MY
STRETCH
STRETCH**

**I'M GOING TO
STRETCH MY FAITH BY:**

- SHOWING UP
- LOVING OTHERS
- FOLLOWING JESUS
- ASKING QUESTIONS
- LOVING GOD



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WEEK 3

SERMON GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith by letting something go.

THE BIBLE

Romans 12:1-2, 16-21; Romans 8:13-14

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

QUESTION | What's one of your bad habits?

- Welcome back! Last week, we spent a lot of time talking about habits – good ones! This week, let's talk about our bad habits. Whether it's biting our nails, daydreaming, checking our notifications nonstop, or playing that addictive game on our phone every chance we get, we all have bad habits.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Ask a few students to share their bad habits – the more obscure or specific, the better.

ACTIVITY | Bad Habit Shoot-Out

- Raise your hand if you've ever thought, "I could stop my bad habit anytime I want. It's easy – I just don't want to."
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Choose two students (preferably two students who just raised their hands) to join you for a quick game at the front of the room. Before your program, prepare a table with 20 [disposable cups](#), plenty of [rubber bands](#), and a [permanent marker](#). When the students join you at the front, write one common bad habit on each of the cups and stack them into two equal pyramids. Give each student a handful of rubber bands and 60 seconds to knock over as many cups as possible by stretching and flinging rubber bands at them.
- It would be nice if stopping a bad habit was as easy as flinging rubber bands at them. Unfortunately, it's not so simple.

STORY | Talk about one of your bad habits.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Share a personal story (or ask a student or volunteer to share a story) about a bad habit you have either broken, or are currently trying to break. Try to keep your example light and fun. You might talk about your habit of stopping at too many fast food restaurants, compulsively playing a game on your phone, or watching "one more episode" before you go to sleep. Don't talk about how you broke this habit — just focus on what it's like to be stuck in a bad habit.

POLL | Stretch Your Honesty

- Biting your nails or constantly looking at your phone might not have an impact on your spiritual health, but there are some bad habits that can prevent your faith from growing.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell your students you're going to read a series of scenarios — as soon as they hear one that applies to them, ask them to stand. Keep going until everyone is standing.
- We're going to stretch our honesty for a minute. Stand up if . . .
 - You've ever held a grudge.
 - There's someone you just can't stand.
 - You've ever struggled to forgive someone.
 - You've ever struggled to ask for forgiveness.
 - You sometimes do things that hurt others, or yourself, and can't seem to stop yourself.
 - You make time for movies and video games, but struggle to make time for God.
- The Bible uses the word "sin" to talk about the bad habits that harm us spiritually, and it reminds us that we're all prone to mistakes and failures. We all have room to grow.
- We've already talked about how we can stretch our faith by making a commitment or starting a new habit. Today we'll explore how we can also stretch our faith by letting something go — kind of like we did with those rubber bands.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:1–2

- We've been looking at a letter written by a guy named Paul to the Christians who lived in Rome almost 2,000 years ago. In this letter, which we now call the book of Romans, he wrote about how we find salvation through Jesus, and how God's salvation impacts not just our eternities, but our everyday lives too.
- Last week, we read the first part of chapter 12. We're going to finish that chapter today, but let's read how it begins one more time.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Romans 12:1–2.
- Transformation — that's the goal, Paul said! Following Jesus isn't just a prayer we pray once and forget about. Stretching and growing our faith goes hand-in-hand with life-change.
 - As followers of Jesus, Paul said we shouldn't look or act like everyone else because God should be transforming us from the inside out.
 - Only God can transform us, but there are some things we can do that make it easier for God's transformation to take place.

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:16–21

- Last week, we read about a bunch of new habits Paul said we can start — habits that help us love other people well and help our faith grow too. Now let's see what else Paul had to say about how we can stretch our faith.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 12:16–21.*
- Paul gave us a pretty extensive list in these verses of some things we need to let go of in order to grow our faith, like . . .
 - Being proud.
 - Being know-it-alls.
 - Holding grudges.
 - Looking for revenge.
 - Letting sin control us.
- There are a lot of "don't"s in this part of Paul's letter. Depending on your personality, these "don't"s might affect you differently.
 - Maybe you like being told what not to do because it gives you clear directions.
 - Maybe you immediately want to rebel because you don't like being told what to do.
 - Maybe you feel ashamed or hopeless because you're not sure how to stop doing some of the things Paul said not to do.

VIDEO | "Drifting," A Clip from Gravity

- The problem with a long list of "don't"s is that it can leave us feeling lost. When we're told all of the ways we *shouldn't* talk, react, or treat people, it might leave us wondering, "Well, then what *should* I do? How *should* I respond when I'm hurt, angry, or frustrated? I don't want to let sin control me, but how do I stop?"
- There's a scene in the movie *Gravity* that I think we can learn from. Dr. Ryan Stone is an astronaut on a spacewalk in earth's orbit when the satellite she is repairing is hit by debris. A piece of the satellite is knocked loose and sent spinning into space, with Stone still attached to it. Her partner frantically tells her to let go, or she'll be launched deep into space and not be able to be rescued. It's terrifying, but finally, she lets go.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Show [this video clip](#) or a portion of it.*
- If she wanted to survive, Stone had to let go of the thing that was sending her spiraling into space. But when she finally let go, she realized letting go was only the first step. After she let go, she was desperate to find something else to hang onto.

STORY | Talk about a bad habit you overcame.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story (or continue your story from earlier in your message) about a time when you broke a bad habit by replacing it with a new and better habit. You might talk about letting go of eating too much fast food by grabbing onto the habit of planning your meals in advance, or letting go of the habit of criticizing others by grabbing onto the habit of speaking positively about others.*
- I've had to deal with a lot of bad habits, and they've all taught me this important lesson about faith: if you want to grow, you have to let go of what's pulling you away from God so you can grab onto something that will bring you closer.

LETTING GO AND GRABBING ON

- With that in mind, let's look back at the passage we just read, because I think Paul understood this well. You see, Paul didn't only give us a list of "don't"s. He also gave us a list of "do"s.
- Paul said to let go of . . .
 - Being proud. Being know-it-alls.
 - Holding grudges.
 - Looking for revenge.
 - Letting sin control us.
- In their place, Paul said to grab onto . . .
 - Humility.
 - Compassion.
 - Integrity.
 - Peacemaking.
 - Goodness.
- Paul wrote this letter because he wanted to see his fellow Jesus-followers grab onto what God wanted for them. But before they could do that, he knew they needed to let go of the harmful things they were already hanging onto.
- Letting go of our bad habits isn't easy — it's a pretty difficult stretch.
 - On our own, we're not good at choosing to do what's good, right, helpful, or Christlike . . . so aren't you glad we're not alone?
 - If you know Jesus, this isn't a battle you need to fight on your own. God's Spirit lives within you and gives you the power to let go of the habits and behaviors that are holding you back so you can grab onto something new. Through Jesus, you can be transformed.
- If you want to see your faith stretch and grow stronger, the good news is that you can! Like our astronaut friend, Dr. Stone, let go — detach from the habits that are pulling you away from God so you can grab onto new habits that will pull you close again. **You can stretch your faith by letting something go.**

***NOW WHAT?** What does God want us to do about it?*

ACTIVITY | Rubber Band Reminders

- Changing any habit is hard because our habits are the things we do automatically, without really thinking about them. But although our habits are automatic, they don't need to be permanent.
- One of the best things we can do when we're trying to break a bad habit is to seek out accountability. We have to get clear about which behavior we want to let go of, and then ask others to help us.
 - We can't be accountable to ourselves until we get really specific about what we want to change.
 - We can't be accountable to others until we ask people who love us to check on us, encourage us, and challenge us.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give every student a [wide rubber band](#) and an [ultra fine-tipped permanent marker](#). Encourage them to write two words on their rubber band: one word they want to let go of (pride, anger, gossip, fear) and one word they want to grab onto (humility, forgiveness, kindness, trust).
- This week, there are two reasons I hope you wear this rubber band around your wrist:
 - As a visual reminder to you of the transformation you want to see.
 - As an invitation to the people you trust to help you continue growing, stretching, and becoming more like Jesus. If there is someone in this room who you'd like to invite to keep you accountable, don't leave today without talking to them.

REFLECTION | Stretch Commitment Card

- I want to give you the opportunity to commit to stretching your faith again. Even if you filled this out last week, maybe you have a new commitment you want to make to let go of a bad habit that's keeping you from growing.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 3 folder, and place one, along with a pen, under each seat. Before asking students to complete their cards, explain each option.
- Every week of this series, I'm asking you to make one of five "stretch" commitments. This week, which stretch will you commit to doing?
- **SHOW UP.** To start, maybe you'll commit to showing up next week (our final week of this series) to listen, discuss, and consider how God might want your faith to be stretched.
- **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you've never made a commitment to follow Jesus before, today might be a great day to let go of the life you've been living so you can start a new life with God.
- **LOVE GOD.** Maybe you already love God, but you want to grow. If that's you, identify one thing that is pulling you away from God and choose to let go of it today.
- **LOVE OTHERS.** If you know you could work on loving people better, try to identify one bad habit that causes you to hurt or overlook others. Then decide to let go of it so you can build a new habit — one that allows you to love people like God loves them.
- **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not ready to make any of these commitments right now, that's okay! If you have questions or doubts, or you want to know more about why so many people in this room have decided to follow Jesus, this is a safe place for those questions. You may not find every answer you're looking for, but there might be something new for you to discover.

RESPONSE | My Stretch

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Have a few cardboard boxes spread around the room, or one long box at the center of the room, labeled with the words "My Stretch." Each week, give students an opportunity to place their cards in the box as confirmation of the commitment they decide to make each week. You can do this quickly by asking students to drop their cards on their way out, or you can draw this out by playing an on-theme worship song while students pray, write, reflect, and turn in their cards. For this week, we suggest the song ["Be Still," by Hillsong Worship](#).
- No matter what you decided to let go of today, remember this — if you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith by letting something go.**

WEEK 3

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

STRETCH



If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS WEEK

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith by letting something go.

THE BIBLE

Romans 12:1-2, 16-21; Romans 8:13-14

- **What's the weirdest habit you have?**
- **Have you ever struggled to quit a bad habit? What happened?**
- **If you could wave a magic wand and permanently change one of your habits or behaviors, what would it be?**
- **You don't have to tell us what it is, but are you struggling right now with a harmful habit you just can't break? How is it holding you back?**
- **How do you usually react when someone tells you not to do something? Do you feel the same way when that "don't" comes from God?**
- **Which of these is the hardest for you to let go of, and why?**
Being proud. Being a know-it-all. Holding a grudge. Looking for revenge. Letting sin control you.
- **Which of these do you most want to grab onto, and why?**
Humility. Compassion. Integrity. Peacemaking. Goodness.
- **What's something you need to let go of, and something you can hold onto instead?**
- **Read Romans 8:13–14. How can we work together with God to break our bad habits? What's God's role and what's our role?**
- **To stretch our faith this week, what's one thing our whole group can commit to letting go of and one thing we can hold onto instead?**

WEEK 3

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

for middle schoolers



If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

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- **To stretch our faith this week, what's one thing our whole group can commit to letting go of and one thing we can hold onto instead?**



WEEK 3

HYBRID TEACHING GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith by letting something go.

THE BIBLE

Romans 12:1-2, 16-21; Romans 8:13-14

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

QUESTION | What's one of your bad habits?

- Welcome back! Last week, we spent a lot of time talking about habits – good ones! This week, let's talk about our bad habits. Whether it's biting our nails, daydreaming, checking our notifications nonstop, or playing that addictive game on our phone every chance we get, we all have bad habits.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask a few students to share their bad habits – the more obscure or specific, the better.*

ACTIVITY | Bad Habit Shoot-Out

- Raise your hand if you've ever thought, "I could stop my bad habit anytime I want. It's easy – I just don't want to."
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Choose two students (preferably two students who just raised their hands) to join you for a quick game at the front of the room. Before your program, prepare a table with 20 [disposable cups](#), plenty of [rubber bands](#), and a [permanent marker](#). When the students join you at the front, write one common bad habit on each of the cups and stack them into two equal pyramids. Give each student a handful of rubber bands and 60 seconds to knock over as many cups as possible by stretching and flinging rubber bands at them.*
- It would be nice if stopping a bad habit was as easy as flinging rubber bands at them. Unfortunately, it's not so simple.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.
- **What's the weirdest habit you have?**
- ★ **Have you ever struggled to quit a bad habit? What happened?**
- **If you could wave a magic wand and permanently change one of your habits or behaviors, what would it be?**

STORY | Talk about one of your bad habits.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Share a personal story (or ask a student or volunteer to share a story) about a bad habit you have either broken, or are currently trying to break. Try to keep your example light and fun. You might talk about your habit of stopping at too many fast food restaurants, compulsively playing a game on your phone, or watching "one more episode" before you go to sleep. Don't talk about how you broke this habit — just focus on what it's like to be stuck in a bad habit.

POLL | Stretch Your Honesty

- Biting your nails or constantly looking at your phone might not have an impact on your spiritual health, but there are some bad habits that can prevent your faith from growing.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell your students you're going to read a series of scenarios — as soon as they hear one that applies to them, ask them to stand. Keep going until everyone is standing.
- We're going to stretch our honesty for a minute. Stand up if . . .
 - You've ever held a grudge.
 - There's someone you just can't stand.
 - You've ever struggled to forgive someone.
 - You've ever struggled to ask for forgiveness.
 - You sometimes do things that hurt others, or yourself, and can't seem to stop yourself.
 - You make time for movies and video games, but struggle to make time for God.
- The Bible uses the word "sin" to talk about the bad habits that harm us spiritually, and it reminds us that we're all prone to mistakes and failures. We all have room to grow.
- We've already talked about how we can stretch our faith by making a commitment or starting a new habit. Today we'll explore how we can also stretch our faith by letting something go — kind of like we did with those rubber bands.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:1–2

- We've been looking at a letter written by a guy named Paul to the Christians who lived in Rome almost 2,000 years ago. In this letter, which we now call the book of Romans, he wrote about how we find salvation through Jesus, and how God's salvation impacts not just our eternities, but our everyday lives too.

- Last week, we read the first part of chapter 12. We're going to finish that chapter today, but let's read how it begins one more time.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 12:1–2.*
- Transformation — that's the goal, Paul said! Following Jesus isn't just a prayer we pray once and forget about. Stretching and growing our faith goes hand-in-hand with life-change.
 - As followers of Jesus, Paul said we shouldn't look or act like everyone else because God should be transforming us from the inside out.
 - Only God can transform us, but there are some things we can do that make it easier for God's transformation to take place.

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:16–21

- Last week, we read about a bunch of new habits Paul said we can start — habits that help us love other people well and help our faith grow too. Now let's see what else Paul had to say about how we can stretch our faith.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 12:16–21.*
- Paul gave us a pretty extensive list in these verses of some things we need to let go of in order to grow our faith, like . . .
 - Being proud.
 - Being know-it-alls.
 - Holding grudges.
 - Looking for revenge.
 - Letting sin control us.
- There are a lot of "don't"s in this part of Paul's letter. Depending on your personality, these "don't"s might affect you differently.
 - Maybe you like being told what not to do because it gives you clear directions.
 - Maybe you immediately want to rebel because you don't like being told what to do.
 - Maybe you feel ashamed or hopeless because you're not sure how to stop doing some of the things Paul said not to do.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- ☆ **You don't have to tell us what it is, but are you struggling right now with a harmful habit you just can't break? How is it holding you back?**
- ☆ **How do you usually react when someone tells you not to do something? Do you feel the same way when that "don't" comes from God?**

VIDEO | "Drifting," A Clip from Gravity

- The problem with a long list of "don't"s is that it can leave us feeling lost. When we're told all of the ways we *shouldn't* talk, react, or treat people, it might leave us wondering, "Well, then what

should I do? How *should* I respond when I'm hurt, angry, or frustrated? I don't want to let sin control me, but how do I stop?"

- There's a scene in the movie Gravity that I think we can learn from. Dr. Ryan Stone is an astronaut on a spacewalk in earth's orbit when the satellite she is repairing is hit by debris. A piece of the satellite is knocked loose and sent spinning into space, with Stone still attached to it. Her partner frantically tells her to let go, or she'll be launched deep into space and not be able to be rescued. It's terrifying, but finally, she lets go.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Show [this video clip](#) or a portion of it.
- If she wanted to survive, Stone had to let go of the thing that was sending her spiraling into space. But when she finally let go, she realized letting go was only the first step. After she let go, she was desperate to find something else to hang onto.

STORY | Talk about a bad habit you overcame.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story (or continue your story from earlier in your message) about a time when you broke a bad habit by replacing it with a new and better habit. You might talk about letting go of eating too much fast food by grabbing onto the habit of planning your meals in advance, or letting go of the habit of criticizing others by grabbing onto the habit of speaking positively about others.
- I've had to deal with a lot of bad habits, and they've all taught me this important lesson about faith: if you want to grow, you have to let go of what's pulling you away from God so you can grab onto something that will bring you closer.

LETTING GO AND GRABBING ON

- With that in mind, let's look back at the passage we just read, because I think Paul understood this well. You see, Paul didn't only give us a list of "don't"s. He also gave us a list of "do"s.
- Paul said to let go of . . .
 - Being proud.
 - Being know-it-alls.
 - Holding grudges.
 - Looking for revenge.
 - Letting sin control us.
- In their place, Paul said to grab onto . . .
 - Humility.
 - Compassion.
 - Integrity.
 - Peacemaking.
 - Goodness.
- Paul wrote this letter because he wanted to see his fellow Jesus-followers grab onto what God wanted for them. But before they could do that, he knew they needed to let go of the harmful things they were already hanging onto.
- Letting go of our bad habits isn't easy – it's a pretty difficult stretch.

- On our own, we're not good at choosing to do what's good, right, helpful, or Christlike . . . so aren't you glad we're not alone?
- If you know Jesus, this isn't a battle you need to fight on your own. God's Spirit lives within you and gives you the power to let go of the habits and behaviors that are holding you back so you can grab onto something new. Through Jesus, you can be transformed.
- If you want to see your faith stretch and grow stronger, the good news is that you can! Like our astronaut friend, Dr. Stone, let go — detach from the habits that are pulling you away from God so you can grab onto new habits that will pull you close again. **You can stretch your faith by letting something go.**

***NOW WHAT?** What does God want us to do about it?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.
- **Which of these is the hardest for you to let go of, and why?**
 - **Being proud.**
 - **Being a know-it-all.**
 - **Holding a grudge.**
 - **Looking for revenge.**
 - **Letting sin control you.**
- **Which of these do you most want to grab onto, and why?**
 - **Humility.**
 - **Compassion.**
 - **Integrity.**
 - **Peacemaking.**
 - **Goodness.**
- ★ **What's something you need to let go of, and something you can hold onto instead?**

ACTIVITY | Rubber Band Reminders

- Changing any habit is hard because our habits are the things we do automatically, without really thinking about them. But although our habits are automatic, they don't need to be permanent.
- One of the best things we can do when we're trying to break a bad habit is to seek out accountability. We have to get clear about which behavior we want to let go of, and then ask others to help us.
 - We can't be accountable to ourselves until we get really specific about what we want to change.
 - We can't be accountable to others until we ask people who love us to check on us, encourage us, and challenge us.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give every student a [wide rubber band](#) and an [ultra fine-tipped permanent marker](#). Encourage them to write two words on their rubber band: one word they want to let go of (pride, anger, gossip, fear) and one word they want to grab onto (humility, forgiveness, kindness, trust).
- This week, there are two reasons I hope you wear this rubber band around your wrist:
 - As a visual reminder to you of the transformation you want to see.
 - As an invitation to the people you trust to help you continue growing, stretching, and becoming more like Jesus. If there is someone in this room who you'd like to invite to keep you accountable, don't leave today without talking to them.

REFLECTION | Stretch Commitment Card

- I want to give you the opportunity to commit to stretching your faith again. Even if you filled this out last week, maybe you have a new commitment you want to make to let go of a bad habit that's keeping you from growing.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 3 folder, and place one, along with a pen, under each seat. Before asking students to complete their cards, explain each option.
- Every week of this series, I'm asking you to make one of five "stretch" commitments. This week, which stretch will you commit to doing?
- **SHOW UP.** To start, maybe you'll commit to showing up next week (our final week of this series) to listen, discuss, and consider how God might want your faith to be stretched.
- **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you've never made a commitment to follow Jesus before, today might be a great day to let go of the life you've been living so you can start a new life with God.
- **LOVE GOD.** Maybe you already love God, but you want to grow. If that's you, identify one thing that is pulling you away from God and choose to let go of it today.
- **LOVE OTHERS.** If you know you could work on loving people better, try to identify one bad habit that causes you to hurt or overlook others. Then decide to let go of it so you can build a new habit — one that allows you to love people like God loves them.
- **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not ready to make any of these commitments right now, that's okay! If you have questions or doubts, or you want to know more about why so many people in this room have decided to follow Jesus, this is a safe place for those questions. You may not find every answer you're looking for, but there might be something new for you to discover.

RESPONSE | My Stretch

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Have a few cardboard boxes spread around the room, or one long box at the center of the room, labeled with the words "My Stretch." Each week, give students an opportunity to place their cards in the box as confirmation of the commitment they decide to make each week. You can do this quickly by asking students to drop their cards on their way out, or you can draw this out by playing an on-theme worship song while students pray, write, reflect, and turn in their cards. For this week, we suggest the song ["Be Still," by Hillsong Worship](#).
- No matter what you decided to let go of today, remember this — if you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith by letting something go.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- **Read Romans 8:13–14. How can we work together with God to break our bad habits? What's God's role and what's our role?**
- **To stretch our faith this week, what's one thing our whole group can commit to letting go of and one thing we can hold onto instead?**



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STRETCH
STRETCH**

I'M GOING TO
STRETCH MY FAITH BY:

- SHOWING UP
- LOVING OTHERS
- FOLLOWING JESUS
- ASKING QUESTIONS
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WEEK 4

SERMON GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith even when you fail.

THE BIBLE

Romans 7:18-25; II Corinthians 12:7-10;
John 21:15-19

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

QUESTION | Have you ever pulled a muscle?

- It's our last week of our series, *Stretch!* In the last few weeks, we've stretched our bodies, stretched our brains, stretched some rubber bands, and hopefully stretched our faith too.
- All of that stretching is great, but it's possible to stretch too far. **Have you ever strained, sprained, or pulled a muscle?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond and tell stories about their muscle injuries.

VIDEO | Stretcher Fails

- If you're familiar with football (the FIFA kind, not the NFL kind), you know injuries are pretty common. Sometimes these injuries are real, but faking an injury is sometimes part of the strategy of the game.
- Either way, when a player gets injured, they sometimes need to be carried off the field on a stretcher. Unfortunately, the stretcher experience can sometimes be more painful than the original injury.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Play [this video](#) of stretcher fails, or something like it. If you don't love the music, you might consider replacing or muting the audio.
- I've got to give these stretcher attendees credit. They're not great at their jobs, but they keep trying! You and I have probably never dropped someone on a stretcher, but we definitely know that sometimes it takes a few tries to get things right.

OBJECT LESSON | Rubik's Cube

- Has anyone ever attempted to solve a Rubik's Cube before? Usually it takes a lot of trial and error to figure out how to solve it. You try, fail, and then try again.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Spend a moment trying to solve the Rubik's Cube while you talk, but then let your students see someone successfully solve it. If you can solve it, go for it! If a student in your ministry can solve it, even better! If all else fails, show a brief clip from a video like [this one](#).*
- No one solves a Rubik's Cube correctly on the first try. It takes a lot of patience to learn how to solve one at all, let alone solve one in record time.

YOU CAN STRETCH YOUR FAITH EVEN WHEN YOU FAIL

- For the last few weeks, we've been talking about how you can grow and strengthen your faith by stretching it, just like you would a muscle. You can stretch your faith by . . .
 - **Making a commitment** to grow.
 - **Starting a new habit** that will help your faith grow.
 - **Letting go of an old habit** that is keeping you from growing.
- When we decide to grow our muscles (physically or spiritually), we all start with big commitments and great intentions, but here's the truth: at some point you will experience set-backs.
 - The commitment you made will feel less exciting, interesting, or urgent than it did in the beginning.
 - You'll forget to practice the new habit you started.
 - You'll once again grab onto that old habit you tried to give up.
- Someday (maybe someday soon) you're going to fail. And when you fail, what will you do next?

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

STORY | Talk about a time you failed at stretching your faith.

- I know no one likes to admit they're a failure, so I'll go first and break the ice. When it comes to my faith, I have failed so many times.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you failed in your faith. Try to choose an example your students can easily relate to. You might talk about a long-term struggle you experienced to pray, read the Bible, or attend church. Or you might share a story about a specific occasion. Either way, talk about the experience of failure, how it felt, and what impact it had on your faith.*
- There are so many reasons we might fail in our faith. Maybe we . . .
 - Commit to reading the Bible every day, but don't.
 - Make it a habit to pray consistently, but suddenly realize it's been months since we last talked to God.
 - Decide to love others like God loves us, until we snap at someone who gets under our skin.
- When we fail, we often feel defeated, ashamed, and hopeless. We sometimes even give up.
- Today I want to challenge you to think about failure differently. What if failure isn't something to fear or be ashamed of? What if failure can actually help our faith grow? What if failure is just part of the stretch?

FAILURES OF THE BIBLE

- Some of the greatest heroes in the Bible were people who some might consider failures — epic failures.
 - **Moses** was chosen to lead God's people, but was terrible at public speaking — and he once killed somebody.
 - **Sarah** was told by God that she would be a mother at an old age, but she laughed in God's face (and took matters into her own hands).
 - God made **David** king of Israel, but David used his power to take advantage of a woman and had her husband killed.
 - One of Jesus' closest disciples, **Peter**, denied having ever known Jesus — and he cut off a guy's ear with a sword.
- All of these great, biblical heroes failed, but their failures weren't the end of their stories. Even when they failed, they let their faith be stretched.
 - **Moses'** faith was stretched when he saw that God could use him, despite his past mistakes and present fears.
 - **Sarah's** faith was stretched when she discovered God not only forgave her for her doubts and disobedience, but still gave her what was promised to her.
 - **David's** faith was stretched when God allowed him to experience both grace and justice for the wrongs he committed.
 - **Peter's** faith was stretched when Jesus not only forgave him for denying Him, but then promised to make Peter a great leader in the history of God's Church.
- All of these people were failures, but their failures weren't the end of their stories. For these followers of God, failure was just another stretch that helped them develop a stronger faith.

SCRIPTURE | Romans 7:15–25

- Paul, one of the most influential leaders in the history of the church and whose letter to the Romans we've been reading, also understood failure well.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 7:15–25.*
- Even Paul, the great church leader and super-Christian, said he struggled.
 - He didn't understand why he did what he did.
 - He wanted to do the right thing, but couldn't seem to do it.
 - He often did things he hated, and couldn't stop.
 - He was always at war between good and evil.
 - He sometimes felt hopeless, but trusted that God would always rescue him.
- When I read Paul's words, I see that the two reasons he often failed are the same two reasons you and I often fail.
 - **WE FAIL TO STOP.** We try to stop doing what we know we shouldn't do, but keep failing.
 - **WE FAIL TO START.** We try to start doing things we know we should do, but keep failing at that too.

SCRIPTURE | II Corinthians 12:7–10

- In another letter (this one written to the Christians in a city called Corinth), Paul spoke about a specific area of his life that caused him to struggle.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read II Corinthians 12:7–10.*
- Not only did Paul fail when it came to sin, but there were also times when Paul felt overwhelmed, weak, and powerless. But rather than being frustrated or angry about his weaknesses, Paul found a way to "delight" or "find pleasure in" those weaknesses. How?
 - Paul understood that his failures and struggles weren't liabilities. They could actually bring him closer to Jesus.
 - When Paul looked at his weaknesses, he saw opportunities for his faith to stretch and grow stronger.
- You might be excited now about stretching your faith and growing closer to Jesus, but at some point, you will feel like a failure.
 - You will make mistakes. You will doubt. You will ask questions. You will lose passion and focus.
 - When you do, remember that God isn't surprised by your failure. Your failure is just part of the stretch.
- Failure will happen, but failure doesn't have to be the end of your story. When you fail (and you will), you have two choices.
 - You can let shame, frustration, and hopelessness prevent you from trying again.
 - Or you can let God use your failure to stretch you and make your faith grow stronger.
- Next time you fail, whether it's next week or in the next five minutes, I hope you choose to keep moving forward and to keep stretching through your failures. **Because you can stretch your faith even when you fail.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

VIDEO | The Brownlee Brothers

- So what do we do when we hit the brick wall that is failure? How do we turn our weakness, sinfulness, or shame into growth? This is the image I hope you remember when you think about failure . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Show [this video](#) of Alistair Brownlee helping his brother Jonny over the finish line of a marathon.
- Keep that image in your mind as I give you three pieces of advice about how to turn a failure into a stretch.
 - **BEFORE YOU FAIL, GET A COMMUNITY.** Do it now, *before* you're stumbling. Surround yourself with people who want to see you succeed and be the kind of person who helps others through their failures. Ask someone to hold you accountable. Reach out for help from others when it's hard to keep moving. Don't be afraid to be honest and vulnerable — it's the best way to get the help you need.
 - **WHEN YOU FAIL, FALL ON JESUS.** Paul knew that only Jesus could rescue him from himself, and the same is true for you and me. When you fail, fall on Jesus. He won't be angry or disappointed or even surprised. He's God! He knows exactly who you are and how you struggle, and He loves you anyway.

- **WHEN YOU FAIL, GET BACK UP.** Don't let failure, or the fear of failure, paralyze you. There is more to your story than your latest or greatest failure. If the people we talked about today teach us anything, it's that God is always ready to forgive and use us, despite our failures.

RESPONSE | My Stretch

- Every week of this series, you've had an opportunity to make a commitment to stretch your faith in a new way. You may have been nervous to share your commitment initially, but today we want you to give you the chance to share your commitments with one another – to say them out loud and ask your community to help you stay committed.
- Over the last few weeks, you may have committed to . . .
 - **SHOW UP.** If you're here, you did it! Share with your group what you've learned these last few weeks and how you are going to put what you've learned into practice.
 - **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you decided to follow Jesus for the first time, we created a tool to help you put into words the commitment that Jesus has made to you, and the commitment you've made in return. Take one, fill it out, and give it to me or another adult in this room.
 - **LOVE GOD.** If you made a commitment to spend more time with God, share it! We can help each other keep our commitments when it gets difficult.
 - **LOVE OTHERS.** If you made a commitment to love others well, share that too! We're going to need each other to keep us accountable.
 - **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not sure what you think about following Jesus, that's okay! I hope you've been asking questions, and I hope you'll continue to ask them. Keep searching for truth. Don't stop.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut both of the handouts provided in your Week 4 folder. Place one "My Stretch" handout, along with a pen, under each seat, like you have in previous weeks, but don't collect the cards this week. Instead, have students share their commitments with each other in small groups (or the whole group, if your group is small enough). Have a handful of the "Survey" handout available, and give one to any student who made a decision to follow Jesus for the first time. Collect the "Survey" handouts at the end, but allow students to hang onto their "My Stretch" cards while they share with each other.*

PRAYER | Prayer of Commitment

- As we close this series, I hope you remember this: if you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith by making a commitment, by starting something new, or by letting something go, and you can stretch your faith even when you fail.**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Pray together for your students and the commitments they've made. You might . . .*
 - Ask five adults to each pray for one of the five types of commitments being made.
 - Break into groups to pray for each other.
 - Pray for the group as a whole with one prayer of commitment.

POST-SERIES STRETCHES

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Follow-up is so important after a commitment opportunity like this! Here are a few ways you might want to follow up after this series ends.*
 - **Help students take a next step.** *Depending on your church's traditions, help students get baptized, begin confirmation, or remember and reflect on their past baptism.*
 - **Share students' commitments with your church leadership.** *Let the rest of your church staff know what God is doing and partner with other ministries to help students take the next step to be baptized, get confirmed, or to serve.*
 - **Empower small group leaders.** *Encourage adult leaders to make a plan for follow-up with each student who made a commitment no student feels alone or unsupported.*
 - **Celebrate!** *Celebrate students' commitments inside and outside of youth group, like on a Sunday morning or in your church newsletter or email.*

WEEK 4

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

STRETCH



If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS WEEK

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith even when you fail.

THE BIBLE

Romans 7:18-25; II Corinthians 12:7-10;
John 21:15-19

- **Have you ever tried to learn something that required a lot of trial and error? What was it?**
- **When you fail at something, how do you usually feel – excited to try again, defeated, ashamed, angry?**
- **Has failure ever taught you something? What was it?**
- **Have you ever felt like you failed God? Does anyone want to share what happened?**
- **Like Paul, have you ever felt like you were stuck doing the wrong thing and wishing you could stop? What happened?**
- **Think about an area of your faith where you feel like you're failing right now. Do you need to stop doing something that's hurting your growth, start doing something that would help you grow, or both?**
- **Have you ever experienced a failure so big that you doubted God could help you? Does anyone want to share their experience?**
- **Read John 21:15–19 and watch how Jesus responds to Peter after Peter failed him three times. What does this show us about God?**
- **How does God help us get back up after our failures?**
- **If someone close to you was struggling in their faith, how would you encourage them? (Did you need to hear any of the encouragement we just shared?)**

WEEK 4

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

for middle schoolers

STRETCH

If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by **making a commitment**, by **starting something new**, and by **letting something go**. We can even stretch our faith **when we feel like we've failed**.

THIS WEEK

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith even when you fail.

THE BIBLE

Romans 7:18-25; II Corinthians 12:7-10;
John 21:15-19

- **Have you ever tried to learn something that required a lot of trial and error? What was it?**
- **When you fail at something, how do you usually feel – excited to try again, defeated, ashamed, angry?**
- **Like Paul, have you ever felt like you were stuck doing the wrong thing and wishing you could stop? What happened?**
- **Read John 21:15–19 and watch how Jesus responds to Peter after Peter failed him three times. What does this show us about God?**
- **How does God help us get back up after our failures?**
- **If someone close to you was struggling in their faith, how would you encourage them? (Did you need to hear any of the encouragement we just shared?)**



WEEK 4

HYBRID TEACHING GUIDE

STRETCH

THE BIG IDEA

You can stretch your faith even when you fail.

THE BIBLE

Romans 7:18-25; II Corinthians 12:7-10;
John 21:15-19

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

QUESTION | Have you ever pulled a muscle?

- It's our last week of our series, *Stretch!* In the last few weeks, we've stretched our bodies, stretched our brains, stretched some rubber bands, and hopefully stretched our faith too.
- All of that stretching is great, but it's possible to stretch too far. **Have you ever strained, sprained, or pulled a muscle?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond and tell stories about their muscle injuries.

VIDEO | Stretcher Fails

- If you're familiar with football (the FIFA kind, not the NFL kind), you know injuries are pretty common. Sometimes these injuries are real, but faking an injury is sometimes part of the strategy of the game.
- Either way, when a player gets injured, they sometimes need to be carried off the field on a stretcher. Unfortunately, the stretcher experience can sometimes be more painful than the original injury.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Play [this video](#) of stretcher fails, or something like it. If you don't love the music, you might consider replacing or muting the audio.
- I've got to give these stretcher attendees credit. They're not great at their jobs, but they keep trying! You and I have probably never dropped someone on a stretcher, but we definitely know that sometimes it takes a few tries to get things right.

OBJECT LESSON | Rubik's Cube

- Has anyone ever attempted to solve a Rubik's Cube before? Usually it takes a lot of trial and error to figure out how to solve it. You try, fail, and then try again.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Spend a moment trying to solve the Rubik's Cube while you talk, but then let your students see someone successfully solve it. If you can solve it, go for it! If a student in your ministry can solve it, even better! If all else fails, show a brief clip from a video like [this one](#).*
- No one solves a Rubik's Cube correctly on the first try. It takes a lot of patience to learn how to solve one at all, let alone solve one in record time.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share.*
- **Have you ever tried to learn something that required a lot of trial and error? What was it?**
- **When you fail at something, how do you usually feel – excited to try again, defeated, ashamed, angry?**

YOU CAN STRETCH YOUR FAITH EVEN WHEN YOU FAIL

- For the last few weeks, we've been talking about how you can grow and strengthen your faith by stretching it, just like you would a muscle. You can stretch your faith by . . .
 - **Making a commitment** to grow.
 - **Starting a new habit** that will help your faith grow.
 - **Letting go of an old habit** that is keeping you from growing.
- When we decide to grow our muscles (physically or spiritually), we all start with big commitments and great intentions, but here's the truth: at some point you will experience set-backs.
 - The commitment you made will feel less exciting, interesting, or urgent than it did in the beginning.
 - You'll forget to practice the new habit you started.
 - You'll once again grab onto that old habit you tried to give up.
- Someday (maybe someday soon) you're going to fail. And when you fail, what will you do next?

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- ☆ **Has failure ever taught you something? What was it?**
- ☆ **Have you ever felt like you failed God? Does anyone want to share what happened?**

STORY | Talk about a time you failed at stretching your faith.

- I know no one likes to admit they're a failure, so I'll go first and break the ice. When it comes to my faith, I have failed so many times.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you failed in your faith. Try to choose an example your students can easily relate to. You might talk about a long-term struggle you experienced to pray, read the Bible, or attend church. Or you might share a story about a specific occasion. Either way, talk about the experience of failure, how it felt, and what impact it had on your faith.*
- There are so many reasons we might fail in our faith. Maybe we . . .
 - Commit to reading the Bible every day, but don't.
 - Make it a habit to pray consistently, but suddenly realize it's been months since we last talked to God.
 - Decide to love others like God loves us, until we snap at someone who gets under our skin.
- When we fail, we often feel defeated, ashamed, and hopeless. We sometimes even give up.
- Today I want to challenge you to think about failure differently. What if failure isn't something to fear or be ashamed of? What if failure can actually help our faith grow? What if failure is just part of the stretch?

FAILURES OF THE BIBLE

- Some of the greatest heroes in the Bible were people who some might consider failures — epic failures.
 - **Moses** was chosen to lead God's people, but was terrible at public speaking — and he once killed somebody.
 - **Sarah** was told by God that she would be a mother at an old age, but she laughed in God's face (and took matters into her own hands).
 - God made **David** king of Israel, but David used his power to take advantage of a woman and had her husband killed.
 - One of Jesus' closest disciples, **Peter**, denied having ever known Jesus — and he cut off a guy's ear with a sword.
- All of these great, biblical heroes failed, but their failures weren't the end of their stories. Even when they failed, they let their faith be stretched.
 - **Moses'** faith was stretched when he saw that God could use him, despite his past mistakes and present fears.
 - **Sarah's** faith was stretched when she discovered God not only forgave her for her doubts and disobedience, but still gave her what was promised to her.
 - **David's** faith was stretched when God allowed him to experience both grace and justice for the wrongs he committed.
 - **Peter's** faith was stretched when Jesus not only forgave him for denying Him, but then promised to make Peter a great leader in the history of God's Church.
- All of these people were failures, but their failures weren't the end of their stories. For these followers of God, failure was just another stretch that helped them develop a stronger faith.

SCRIPTURE | Romans 7:15–25

- Paul, one of the most influential leaders in the history of the church and whose letter to the Romans we've been reading, also understood failure well.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Romans 7:15–25.*
- Even Paul, the great church leader and super-Christian, said he struggled.
 - He didn't understand why he did what he did.
 - He wanted to do the right thing, but couldn't seem to do it.
 - He often did things he hated, and couldn't stop.
 - He was always at war between good and evil.
 - He sometimes felt hopeless, but trusted that God would always rescue him.
- When I read Paul's words, I see that the two reasons he often failed are the same two reasons you and I often fail.
 - **WE FAIL TO STOP.** We try to stop doing what we know we shouldn't do, but keep failing.
 - **WE FAIL TO START.** We try to start doing things we know we should do, but keep failing at that too.

SCRIPTURE | II Corinthians 12:7–10

- In another letter (this one written to the Christians in a city called Corinth), Paul spoke about a specific area of his life that caused him to struggle.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read II Corinthians 12:7–10.*
- Not only did Paul fail when it came to sin, but there were also times when Paul felt overwhelmed, weak, and powerless. But rather than being frustrated or angry about his weaknesses, Paul found a way to "delight" or "find pleasure in" those weaknesses. How?
 - Paul understood that his failures and struggles weren't liabilities. They could actually bring him closer to Jesus.
 - When Paul looked at his weaknesses, he saw opportunities for his faith to stretch and grow stronger.
- You might be excited now about stretching your faith and growing closer to Jesus, but at some point, you will feel like a failure.
 - You will make mistakes. You will doubt. You will ask questions. You will lose passion and focus.
 - When you do, remember that God isn't surprised by your failure. Your failure is just part of the stretch.
- Failure will happen, but failure doesn't have to be the end of your story. When you fail (and you will), you have two choices.
 - You can let shame, frustration, and hopelessness prevent you from trying again.
 - Or you can let God use your failure to stretch you and make your faith grow stronger.
- Next time you fail, whether it's next week or in the next five minutes, I hope you choose to keep moving forward and to keep stretching through your failures. **Because you can stretch your faith even when you fail.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- **Like Paul, have you ever felt like you were stuck doing the wrong thing and wishing you could stop? What happened?**
- ★ **Think about an area of your faith where you feel like you're failing right now. Do you need to stop doing something that's hurting your growth, start doing something that would help you grow, or both?**
- ★ **Have you ever experienced a failure so big that you doubted God could help you? Does anyone want to share their experience?**

VIDEO | The Brownlee Brothers

- So what do we do when we hit the brick wall that is failure? How do we turn our weakness, sinfulness, or shame into growth? This is the image I hope you remember when you think about failure . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Show [this video](#) of Alistair Brownlee helping his brother Jonny over the finish line of a marathon.*
- Keep that image in your mind as I give you three pieces of advice about how to turn a failure into a stretch.
 - **BEFORE YOU FAIL, GET A COMMUNITY.** Do it now, *before* you're stumbling. Surround yourself with people who want to see you succeed and be the kind of person who helps others through their failures. Ask someone to hold you accountable. Reach out for help from others when it's hard to keep moving. Don't be afraid to be honest and vulnerable — it's the best way to get the help you need.
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RESPONSE | My Stretch

- Every week of this series, you've had an opportunity to make a commitment to stretch your faith in a new way. You may have been nervous to share your commitment initially, but today we want you to give you the chance to share your commitments with one another — to say them out loud and ask your community to help you stay committed.

- Over the last few weeks, you may have committed to . . .
 - **SHOW UP.** If you're here, you did it! Share with your group what you've learned these last few weeks and how you are going to put what you've learned into practice.
 - **FOLLOW JESUS.** If you decided to follow Jesus for the first time, we created a tool to help you put into words the commitment that Jesus has made to you, and the commitment you've made in return. Take one, fill it out, and give it to me or another adult in this room.
 - **LOVE GOD.** If you made a commitment to spend more time with God, share it! We can help each other keep our commitments when it gets difficult.
 - **LOVE OTHERS.** If you made a commitment to love others well, share that too! We're going to need each other to keep us accountable.
 - **ASK QUESTIONS.** If you're not sure what you think about following Jesus, that's okay! I hope you've been asking questions, and I hope you'll continue to ask them. Keep searching for truth. Don't stop.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut both of the handouts provided in your Week 4 folder. Place one "My Stretch" handout, along with a pen, under each seat, like you have in previous weeks, but don't collect the cards this week. Instead, have students share their commitments with each other in small groups (or the whole group, if your group is small enough). Have a handful of the "Survey" handout available, and give one to any student who made a decision to follow Jesus for the first time. Collect the "Survey" handouts at the end, but allow students to hang onto their "My Stretch" cards while they share with each other.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share.*
- **Read John 21:15–19 and watch how Jesus responds to Peter after Peter failed him three times. What does this show us about God?**
- **How does God help us get back up after our failures?**
- **If someone close to you was struggling in their faith, how would you encourage them? (Did you need to hear any of the encouragement we just shared?)**

PRAYER | Prayer of Commitment

- As we close this series, I hope you remember this: if you want your faith to grow and be strengthened, it doesn't happen overnight. It has to start somewhere, and it can start today with a simple stretch. **You can stretch your faith by making a commitment, by starting something new, or by letting something go, and you can stretch your faith even when you fail.**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Pray together for your students and the commitments they've made. You might . . .*
 - Ask five adults to each pray for one of the five types of commitments being made.
 - Break into groups to pray for each other.
 - Pray for the group as a whole with one prayer of commitment.

POST-SERIES STRETCHES

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Follow-up is so important after a commitment opportunity like this! Here are a few ways you might want to follow up after this series ends.*
 - **Help students take a next step.** *Depending on your church's traditions, help students get baptized, begin confirmation, or remember and reflect on their past baptism.*
 - **Share students' commitments with your church leadership.** *Let the rest of your church staff know what God is doing and partner with other ministries to help students take the next step to be baptized, get confirmed, or to serve.*
 - **Empower small group leaders.** *Encourage adult leaders to make a plan for follow-up with each student who made a commitment no student feels alone or unsupported.*
 - **Celebrate!** *Celebrate students' commitments inside and outside of youth group, like on a Sunday morning or in your church newsletter or email.*



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STRETCH**

**I'M GOING TO
STRETCH MY FAITH BY:**

- SHOWING UP
- LOVING OTHERS
- FOLLOWING JESUS
- ASKING QUESTIONS
- LOVING GOD



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NAME:

GRADE:

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN COMING TO OUR CHURCH?

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHO IS JESUS?

TELL US ABOUT THE COMMITMENT YOU'D LIKE TO MAKE TO GOD, AND WHY YOU'D LIKE TO MAKE IT.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU WITH YOUR NEW COMMITMENT?

NAME:

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HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN COMING TO OUR CHURCH?

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHO IS JESUS?

TELL US ABOUT THE COMMITMENT YOU'D LIKE TO MAKE TO GOD, AND WHY YOU'D LIKE TO MAKE IT.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU WITH YOUR NEW COMMITMENT?





STUDENT COMMUNICATION GUIDE

STRETCH

INSTRUCTIONS

TEXTING

While your parents and volunteers should be receiving regular emails from you, students aren't exactly reliable emailers. Instead, we suggest communicating with students through texting, using a safe mass messaging service like [Remind](#). You can use mass texting to share . . .

- Upcoming news and announcements.
- A look at what you're teaching.
- One-Minute Sermon videos.
- Encouragement and devotionals.
- A survey or feedback question.

SOCIAL MEDIA

For students, we recommend **using your Facebook page and Instagram account** to communicate directly with students, but make sure whatever platforms you choose are the platforms your students are already using.

Use our [Social Media Plan spreadsheet](#) to plan what to post, where to post it, and when to post it. Use the Big Ideas, graphics, videos, and teaching content we provide to fill up the teaching-related portions of your social media plan each week.

Copy and paste these weekly posts into either your Social Media Plan spreadsheet, a post scheduling service like [Buffer](#), or directly onto your favorite social media platform.

Hey everyone! We're starting a new series on spiritual habits this week called Stretch. See you there!

Week 1 of Stretch is in the books! We talked about how you can stretch your faith with a commitment.

This week in our series Stretch we talked about the importance of building habits that help us love God and others. Here's the recap: you can stretch your faith by starting something new.

In Week 3 of Stretch, we talked about stretching our faith by letting go of unhealthy or sinful habits. Here was our big idea: you can stretch your faith by letting something go.

It's our final week of Stretch! It's been a great conversation. We closed with a conversation about how we can stretch our faith even when we fail.



ONE-MINUTE SERMON SCRIPTS

STRETCH

ONE-MINUTE SERMONS

After you teach each week, we recommend **filming a video of yourself re-teaching your message in one minute or less**. Then post it on social media! We've written the beginnings of a script for you each week, and we've also filmed complete [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) for you too, in partnership with [Rescue a Generation](#). Make your own or post ours — whatever you want!

WEEK 1

Stop what you're doing right now and stretch. Seriously, do it! Stretch! It feels pretty good, right? That's because stretching your body helps your muscles stay healthy, flexible, and able to grow. Your faith is kind of like that too. In Scripture, we can learn how to stretch and grow our own faith from the stories and words of the Jesus-followers who've gone before us. There's Peter and Andrew, who dropped everything to follow Jesus; or Mary Magdalene, who followed Jesus even when things got really difficult; or Paul, whose entire life changed the instant he chose to follow Jesus. These people have pretty extraordinary stories of faith, but they all started in the exact same way: they simply made a commitment. So if you want to stretch your faith, what's a new commitment you could make? To follow Jesus for the first time? To love God more? To love others more? **You can stretch your faith with a commitment.** So let's stretch!

WEEK 2

Have you ever seen those "before and after" posts of body-builders who document their journeys of building muscle and lifting heavier and heavier weights? Those transformations can be pretty drastic, but even the most drastic transformations are the result of something really simple: new habits, like daily workouts, specific foods, and nutrient supplements. And you know what? If you want to grow your faith (and not just your muscles), the same principle applies. You can grow your faith by starting a new habit that helps you spend more time with God (like reading the Bible, praying, or worshiping on your own), but Romans 12 and II Peter 1 tell us about some other habits that will help our faith grow too, and they're all about loving each other well. So do you want to stretch your faith? **You can, by starting something new** — like a habit that helps you love God and love others better.

WEEK 3

Okay, let's be honest. We all have a bad habit or two, don't we? Whether it's biting your nails, daydreaming, checking your phone, complaining, talking badly about others, or maybe something even more self-destructive, we all know how hard it can be to break a bad habit. Most of our bad habits don't directly impact our spiritual health, but the truth is, some of them do. The apostle Paul knew this was true, so he gives us a list of "don't"s in Romans 12 — a list of behaviors that we need to let go of and walk away from, like pride, holding grudges, looking for revenge, and letting sin control you. So if you want to see your faith stretch and grow stronger, let go — detach from the habits that are pulling you away from God so you can grab onto new habits that will pull you close again. **You can stretch your faith by letting something go.**

WEEK 4

Have you ever failed? Like, big time? Have you ever felt like you've failed God? I know I have! Those moments can leave us feeling defeated, ashamed, or hopeless, but today I want to challenge you to think about failure differently. What if failure isn't something to fear or be ashamed of? What if failure can actually help our faith grow? The Bible is full of people who failed God in huge ways, but who God never gave up on. Paul talked about this in II Corinthians 12, saying he struggles to do what's right and can't stop doing what's wrong. And for that, he says he's *thankful*, because his weaknesses bring him closer to Jesus. When you fail like Paul often did, you have two choices. You can let shame, frustration, and hopelessness knock you down. Or you can let God use your failure to make your faith grow stronger. Remember, **you can stretch your faith even when you fail.**



PARENT COMMUNICATION GUIDE

STRETCH

INSTRUCTIONS

EMAIL

Edit and send your [Parent Email](#) for this series. It includes . . .

- Upcoming news and announcements.
- A look at what you're teaching.
- A helpful video, article, or resource.
- A survey or feedback question.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Once you have your monthly email written, you can **repurpose the content in that email on your social media platforms**. For parents, we recommend using your Facebook *page* to broadcast information to everyone and a Facebook *group* to start conversations just for parents.

Use our [Social Media Plan spreadsheet](#) to plan what to post, where to post it, and when to post it. Use the Big Ideas, graphics, videos, and teaching content we provide to fill up the teaching-related portions of your social media plan each week. In the next column, we've written weekly posts to parents about each week of this series that you can use if you'd like.

Copy and paste these weekly posts into either your Social Media Plan spreadsheet, a post scheduling service like [Buffer](#), or directly onto your favorite social media platform.

Hey parents! We're starting a new series on spiritual habits this week called Stretch. Check your email for all the details!

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It's our final week of Stretch! It's been a great conversation with your teenagers. We closed with a conversation about how we can stretch our faith even when we fail.

And don't forget to use the [#growcurriculum](#) hashtag when you post!



VOLUNTEER COMMUNICATION GUIDE

STRETCH

INSTRUCTIONS

EMAIL

Edit and send your weekly [Volunteer Emails](#) for this series. They include . . .

- Upcoming news and announcements.
- A look at what you're teaching.
- A helpful video, article, or resource.
- A practical tip or quote.
- A survey or feedback question.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Once you have your monthly email written, you can **repurpose the content in that email on your social media platforms.** For volunteers, we recommend using your Facebook *page* to broadcast information to everyone and a Facebook *group* to start conversations just for volunteers.

Use our [Social Media Plan spreadsheet](#) to plan what to post, where to post it, and when to post it. Use the Big Ideas, graphics, videos, and teaching content we provide to fill up the teaching-related portions of your social media plan each week.

Copy and paste these weekly posts for volunteers into either your Social Media Plan spreadsheet, a post scheduling service like [Buffer](#), or directly onto your favorite social media platform.

Hey team! We're starting a new series on spiritual habits this week called Stretch. Check your email for all the details!

Week 1 of Stretch is coming up! We're talking about how you can stretch your faith with a commitment.

This week in our series Stretch we're talking about the importance of building habits that help us love God and others. Here's the preview: you can stretch your faith by starting something new.

In Week 3 of Stretch, we're talking about stretching our faith by letting go of unhealthy or sinful habits. Here's our big idea: you can stretch your faith by letting something go.

It's our final week of Stretch! It's been a great conversation so far. We're closing with a conversation about how we can stretch our faith even when we fail.

And don't forget to use the [#growcurriculum](#) hashtag when you post!