

Muscle Memory

I. Preamble & Prayer

A. March Madness

- I love this time of year—they call it March Madness
- Well, they do, *if* you follow college basketball here in America
- I remember well this time of year when growing up in the Midwest
- When I saw the college teams playing the NCAA or NIT tournaments, it made me want to grab my basketball and spend more time shooting around myself
- My brother and I created our own kind of March Madness
- We'd play pick-up games at the courts in the neighborhood
- But when all was quiet I would sneak out and play Around-the-World
- It's a game of risk and reward—
 - a. You begin with a shot under the basket to start
 - b. And then shoot a baseline medium shot, going in one direction
 - c. Then a corner baseline 3-pointer
 - d. Then you shoot in segments all the way around past the very top of the key
 - e. To the corner baseline 3-pointer
 - f. Medium baseline shot
 - g. Then beneath the basket
- Which at this point begins you on a shooting spree back around
- Making a complete circle—it's why they call it Around-the-World
- But here's the deal—as you do the shoot-around, *if* you miss, you can take a second shot
- But *if* you miss the second shot, you have to go back to start and begin all over again
- So, when no one else was around, I would practice and practice in order to go around the world without stopping
- Point was this—keep practicing and with each practice the day would come with you could go *all the way around* without ever giving up your turn

B. And one day I did it and with very few second shots

C. Muscle Memory

- My point is this—hitting from each spot without stopping wasn't luck
- Well, it was and it wasn't—it's called muscle memory
- Shooting a basketball is akin to riding a bicycle

- Once you've learned the skill, you'll never forget it
- Despite the two words being used together—*muscle memory* is not stored in your muscles
- It is a procedural memory stored in your brain anytime you repeat a muscle movement
- Whether it's putting a golf ball, playing the violin, or performing a dance routine—the muscle memory becomes stronger the more it is repeated

D. 10,000 hour rule (OS)

- Although there are detractors, I abide by the 10,000 hour rule introduced by psychologist Anders Ericsson and made popular today by Malcolm Gladwell
- The 10,000 hour rule purports that in order to be an expert at anything it takes roughly 10,000 hours
- Such a rule is both encouraging and discouraging
- Encouraging because anyone can do it if they set their mind to it
- Discouraging because there simply are no shortcuts no matter how smart or gifted you are
- So those game-ending clutch basketball shots don't appear from nothing but beginners luck

E. Clutch Shots (OS)

- I have some news for you
- Jesus, when he walked this earth
- Made clutch shots—healings, words of truth spoken, lives changed
- How did he do this day in, day out?
- Well consider this thought—

“Morning by morning he (Jesus) communicated with his Father in heaven, receiving from him daily a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.” –*Signs of the Times*, Ellen White, 11/21/1895

- Jesus himself practiced muscle memory
- Exercising his faith or prayer muscle every day—hour upon hour

F. Prayer – Lord Jesus, we're each one very easily defeated in our faith without proper discipline and training. Will you give us your presence Holy Spirit to attend this message and teach us how we can succeed in living life in Your presence. AMEN

II. Message

A. Jesus' spiritual discipline

- Did you know that Jesus regularly took time to work-out spiritually?
- That's right and especially at the most challenging moments too
 - a. He had had a very long day and yet early the next morning he was up on the mountain working out
 - b. He had a ground swell of interest in him as candidate for being King of the Jews and he broke the rally off in order to work-out

c. He had very busy day coming and yet went without sleep and spent all night working out

- Working out that is *spiritually*
- TEXT: Mark 6:44-46 NLT READ FROM BIBLE
- Imagine that, the crowds would only build and his popularity shoot through the stratosphere
- But instead Jesus tells everyone, “Goodbye!” and he’s up the mountain by himself *to pray*
- Well you might be saying, “Pastor, that’s Jesus. But me!”

B. “Mike, knock it off.”

- ✓ Pastor Mike Yaconelli tells the following story
- ✓ A couple of years ago, my wife and I sat across the table from a woman we highly respected
- ✓ A deeply spiritual lady who had powerfully impacted our lives
- ✓ This woman spent most of her life resisting the noise and activity of the world to seek God in silence and solitude
- ✓ She had spent hundreds of weeks in silent retreat
- ✓ This was a woman so saturated with her faith, you could almost smell God when she came into the room
- ✓ They were talking about prayer...and Pastor Mike blurted, “It’s embarrassing to be sitting with you.”
- ✓ “You spend days, weeks, even months in prayer. I’m lucky if I spend ten minutes. Compared to you, I’m not very spiritual, I’m afraid.” Said Mike
- ✓ Her eyes, flashing with anger, caught Mike’s, and she fired back, “Oh, Mike, knock it off.”
- ✓ “First of all, you don’t spend every day with me. You don’t know me at all. You are comparing what you know about yourself to what you don’t know about me.
- ✓ “Secondly, I battle depression daily, and it has won during several periods of my life. I never told you about it. I don’t have a family; I like to be alone and silent. Trust me, I am just as ‘unspiritual’ as you are.”
- ✓ Then she said gently, “You think about God all the time, right?”
- ✓ “Well, sort of,” Mike said.
- ✓ **(OS) “Thinking about God is being with God. Being with God is spirituality. Thinking about God is praying. So shut up with this guilt stuff; you have been praying most of your life! You are a spiritual person!”**

C. A steep learning curve

- I believe the point is this—becoming a person who commits to a spiritual work-out is not something unattainable
- Just like learning a foreign language or martial arts, spiritual practices have a learning curve
- Imagine becoming upset the first stay in a foreign class because when it ended you weren’t fluent
- Or getting discouraged when you ended your first week of training and you didn’t receive your black belt
- Living a Spirit-led life is a steep learning curve—and it takes time—and by time, I mean it takes decades, not days

D. Consider the Spiritual Practices

- Why take the spiritual practices of prayer, praise and worship, and Bible study
 - a. Prayer—your first prayer will feel like a kindergartner’s first day
 - b. Praise—your praise and worship may seem as awkward as baby toddler’s first swim
 - c. Bible study—your first time in His word may appear to have you immediately overwhelmed
- But wait, here’s what your God and mine is saying in the words of Ezekiel 18:21-23
- **TEXT: Ezekiel 18:21-23 MSG (OS)**

“But a wicked person who turns his back on that life of sin and keeps all my statutes, living a just and righteous life, he’ll live, really live. He won’t die. I won’t keep a list of all the things he did wrong. He will live. Do you think I take any pleasure in the death of wicked men and women? Isn’t it my pleasure that they turn around, no longer living wrong but living right—really living?”

- ✓ God is looking to put your first prayer on the front of his refrigerator
- ✓ When the worship service ends and you sang that worship song with such fervor, God in heaven was grinning from ear to ear, saying, “That’s my new daughter, my son made new.”
- ✓ And when you read your Bible for twenty minutes the other day and tears welled up in your eyes as you read, God looked down and mixed His tears with yours—“So glad to see you working out!” I think I heard him say
- ✓ This may shock some of you, but *spirituality training* is—
 - a. A home for those who don’t have life all figured out
 - b. A shelter for those who don’t know the Bible as well as they could
 - c. A quiet cove for the ones who don’t have their spiritual lives all together
 - d. It’s the “rest of us” who actually felt somehow there wasn’t a rest of us
 - e. Christians who are trying to follow Jesus the best they know how
- We need, no, we must have a gift that proceeds all other gifts—the Holy Spirit

E. TEXT—Romans 8:5, 4b – Our Scripture Lesson

“Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit...(what if) we no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.”

- I was visiting with Helen Tkalec, our office secretary here at Valley
- And we were talking of choosing to do wrong or choosing to do right
- Helen said, “My mother used to speak in her native Serbian and would ask, are you saying a “small yes” and a “small no”?”
- Which are we saying to our sinful nature and the Holy Spirit
- Notice how similar they look in the Serbian language
- Here’s where the muscle memory becomes critical
- **Q-What are you saying “small yes” to and “small no’s” to?**

F. Theory of Everything (OS)

- In case you did know, math and the sciences were not my strength in school
- What I learned in Physics class for example was due to those whom I studied with
- For them it came easy and so they made it easier for me
- What I did learn in the realm of physics was this,
- **(OS) An all-encompassing theoretical framework is what fully explains and links together all physical aspects of the universe**
- This is called the theory of everything
- It's also known as master theory, ultimate theory or final theory
- Here's God's theory of everything—***the answer to every prayer is more of the Holy Spirit (OS)***
 - a. Need to make a critical decision? – You need the Spirit of wisdom
 - b. Need the right words for a business proposal, marriage proposal? –You need the Holy Spirit to operate the teleprompter
 - c. Need a little love? –That is the first fruit of the Spirit—what you need is more of the Holy Spirit
 - d. Need to overcome an addiction?–The last fruit of the Spirit, by no means the least gift, is that of self-control
- Whatever it is that you need more of, you need more of the Holy Spirit

G. 40 Days of Devotion and Prayer in Preparation for the 2nd Coming of Christ

- Beginning three weeks from now we are going to set sail on a 40 day cruise with the Holy Spirit
- We're going to pass again the clipboards for those who have not signed up
- These are the two books, one for those whose mother language is Spanish and the other for those who prefer English
- Again, here are the topics we will be covering each day **(OS-4)**
-

III. Application

A. I need the Holy Spirit

- Is your life in chaos, the Holy Spirit is hovering like He did at Creation, ready to bring order to your chaos
- Your life may be full of questions, the Holy Spirit has the answers
- No matter what problems you face, the Holy Spirit is able to provide the solutions
- Here is what I am learning, I need the Holy Spirit more today than I did yesterday
- And I need as much of Him as I can get
- One fellow pastor remarked, "The Holy Spirit doesn't make us better than anybody else, he make us better than ourselves!"

B. The Holy Spirit needs me

- Not only do I need the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit needs me
- We are in a last day Pentecost—a time for the Latter Rain to fall
- Just as Jesus urged the disciples at His ascension to tarry in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit
- So we must tarry and pray for the Holy Spirit
- Let me put it in agricultural terms—the Holy Spirit can't fill you if you are full of yourself
 - a. Sin is a seed—if you plant it and water it, it will grow...if you starve it, it'll die
 - b. Same with holiness—it's a harvest God is looking for
- **TEXT: Galatians 6:9 (OS)**

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

- It absolutely doesn't make sense for a farmer to plant beans and then to be surprised that his crop doesn't come up as corn
- Why? Because we reap what we sow...
- Yet, some of us appear shocked when the seeds of sin yield their ugly fruit
- Friend, the 40 days is a journey in holiness---and the holiness is a harvest
- What are you planting?
 - a. Joy or ingratitude?
 - b. Patience or impatience?
 - c. Self-control or self-indulgence?
- There's a law you cannot break—the law of sowing and reaping
- It can only break us or make us, *if* you sow the right seed

IV. Close

- Yesterday, I was preparing today's message
- But I had lost something very important in our house
- I looked, and looked, and looked
- Retracing my steps, reliving my day to that point, but to no avail
- So, as I had asked for the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the day, I just paused and yielded this dilemma to Him
- Then proceeded with getting down to writing the message for today
- I distinctly remember listening, feeling for a nudge from the Holy Spirit
- I thought all my options were exhausted, that I had retraced every step, but no
- Suddenly I remembered one room I had not gone over carefully

- And when I walked in I began combing the room, and then felt a nudge to check the trash can in that room
 - And there it was, I stopped, and said, “Thank you, thank you Holy Spirit!”
 - What’s amazing is this—that is just the beginning of what He can do for us.
 - He wants to save lost people and not just lost things! AMEN!
- V. **Prayer** – Lord Jesus, you wrote to us these words long ago...dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For *if* you live by it dictates, you will die. But *if* through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature you will live. (Who here wants to exercise their muscle memory in the power of the Spirit? Saying a small yes until it becomes a large yes?) Lord, will you move and anoint each heart with the Holy Spirit here today, we ask in Jesus’ name, AMEN!