

**THE BIG IDEA: God stretches us in order to increase our capacity.**The Take-Off

I run quite a bit; some seasons more than others, but I've been pretty consistent at it for the last 10 years.

There is one thing about running that I hate more than any other.

- It's not the first mile (although starting isn't as fun as finishing most days)
- It's not the actual running
- It isn't even the nasty, sweat-drenched clothes
- The one thing I hate above all else doesn't even involve running.

It's stretching.

It feels like a waste of time, and yet it is considered the most important thing to do before and after a workout.

Stretching keeps the muscles flexible, strong, healthy. It helps us maintain range of motion.

Not stretching increases tightness in the body; muscles shorten and put strain on joints - OUCH!

So we'll either have pain while we're stretching or pain because we didn't stretch.

If you'll turn with me to [Isaiah 54:1-3 \(NIV\)](#), you'll also see that stretching isn't just physical - it's spiritual, too.

This is a SPECIFIC prophecy to Israel - they would be restored from captivity

This is a SPIRITUAL truth to us - we are part of a Kingdom that is:

- always growing (Matt. 13:31-32), and
- always expanding (Matt. 13:33)

The original hearers would have identified right away with the imagery:

- nomadic tents had 3 rows of 3 poles that created 2 rooms
- to expand, you'd add another row of 3 poles, but the tent had to be stretched tight

The point for us? **God stretches us in order to increase our capacity.**

**1. How does God stretch us?**

- This is not meant to be exhaustive, but **here are 4 areas where we see God stretching people** in the Bible
- ONE: obedience
  - Mark 3:1-6 / the man stretched out his hand in obedience BEFORE it was healed
  - Exodus 14:14-22 / Moses stretched his staff over the waters BEFORE they parted
- TWO: faith
  - Joshua 3:8, 14-16
    - ▶ Normally the Jordan could be up to 100 feet wide, 3-10 feet deep
    - ▶ But this was in the spring, the time of the latter rains which were much stronger than the early rains in the winter
    - ▶ The river would have overflowed its banks
    - ▶ [\[VIDEO / Jordan River at flood stage\]](#)
    - ▶ That's what the men carrying the ark stepped into BEFORE it parted
  - Isaiah 43:2 / The water and fire stretch our faith to believe that God is with us
- THREE: stewardship
  - Malachi 3:10 / it stretched the people of God to go from thieves to tithers
  - Proverbs 3:9
    - ▶ Hebrew word for "honor" is "kavad" meaning "heavy, weighty"
    - ▶ In a bad sense it means burdensome, but in the good sense it means numerous, rich
    - ▶ The point is that stewardship will stretch us to greater generosity
    - ▶ We see this in 2 Corinthians 8:1-3 / their giving stretched BEYOND their ability
- FOUR: love
  - Matthew 5:43-48
  - Loving those who love us doesn't really stretch us
  - Jesus wants us to increase our capacity to love, so he gives the command to love our enemies
  - Now THAT will stretch us!
- One last thought: I'm sure there are lots of instruments that God uses to stretch us in these areas, but the 2 that I have found to be the most common are RELATIONSHIPS and CIRCUMSTANCES

## 2. What happens when God stretches us?

- a. It's one thing to know that we'll be stretched and how we'll be stretched, but let's finish this morning understanding **what happens when we're stretched**.
- b. Remember, God stretches us in order to increase our capacity, and here is how that plays out
- c. Stretching increases our receiving capacity
  - **Psalm 81:10 (NIV)**
  - Open WIDE and receive good things from God
  - We can trust him to fill us because he delivered us
  - Our capacity to receive is 100% related to how wide we stretch
  - Juice glass vs a Big Gulp - which will hold more?
- d. It's good to receive, but we all know that God doesn't just want to fill us - he wants to spill us, too.
- e. In other words, he doesn't just want us to be reservoirs; he wants us to be rivers
- f. Let's look back in Isaiah 54
- g. We know in verse 2 that they expanded, but what we see in verse 3 is that it wasn't just to get as many people under the tent as possible
- h. It was to be sent to the nations
- i. Stretching increases our sending capacity

### The Landing

If I can get a couple of people to help me out, I want to close this morning with a simple illustration

[BALLOON LAUNCHER / Stretched to be launched]

Spiritual stretching isn't any less unpleasant than the stretching I do as a runner, and so it's important to remember the why - God is increasing our capacity to receive and to be sent

That means that the greater we're stretched, the farther we're sent.

Let's pray.