



**You don't have to be your dad...
You can become God's man!**

Exercising Spiritual Muscle---Compromise

How strong are your spiritual muscles? Are you focusing on training yourself to obey the commands of Jesus in your everyday life? Let's start by focusing on Luke 22:39. In this verse, Jesus commands us to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Sound easy? Think again.

Imagine this: You are the owner of a small business. The economy is rough and money is getting tight. You come up with a solution that will save you time and money; however, it will place a burden on your customers and your vendors. Do you do what is best for your bottom line or do you think about others?

Consider this scenario: You and another person are both being considered for a position at church. You hear a rumor about them. There is no proof that it is true, in fact it seems a little far-fetched. Still, if it got around, a shadow would be cast on their reputation and you would be guaranteed the position. Do you stop the rumor dead in it's tracks or do you encourage it or even spread it further? Does this fall under "Do to others as you want done to you"? (Luke 6:31)

Lastly, think about this: You are working on a project with a woman who seems very open to a little flirtation--nothing more. You know she is married with children, so what's the harm? It's just flirting and it makes you feel really good about yourself. Are you loving her husband as you would love yourself?

It is easy to say that we want to obey the commands of Jesus. It is another thing to actually apply them to real life situations. That's when we realize that we have to train ourselves to love our neighbor and treat people the way that we want to be treated. Just like I would have to train my muscles before I could run a marathon, I must train my mind to make every decision based on this principle. Before I make a choice, I must think "How will this affect those around me?" It is something we must train ourselves to do, one decision, one day at a time.

In order to obey Jesus' command properly we have to start with the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The answer is EVERYBODY. Every person that you come in contact with is your neighbor. Every person that will be affected by your actions or decision is your neighbor. That's a lot of people! It includes your family, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and even people you may not know. Jesus is saying that we need to put others before ourselves. We need to consider the affects that our actions and choices will have on other people. We need to live our lives selflessly as He did, not selfishly. This

includes thinking about how our actions will affect another person's soul.

In Romans, Paul expands on this commandment.

Romans 13: 10 says, "Love does no harm to his neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

Romans 14:7 says, "No one lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone."

Romans 14:13 says, "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brothers way."

Finally he says "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall." (Romans 14:21)

In these passages, Paul places the burden on us of caring for the souls of other people. He says that we should not do things that could cause other people to sin.

The truth is that everything we do has an affect on someone else. The way we dress, how we speak, the places and people we endorse. If we are going to call ourselves followers of Christ, we need to think about how our lives influence other people. Do we make people want to be Christians or do we turn them away from Him? Does your life encourage other Christians to grow spiritually and become stronger in the walk with God or are you a stumbling block that keeps their spiritual life in turmoil? By asking ourselves these questions, we exercise our spiritual muscles. Putting "Love your neighbor" into practice is how we train ourselves to obey Jesus.

Recently, I had an experience that drove home to me the importance of obeying "Love your neighbor as yourself." A Christian that I know made a series of decisions that affected the lives of other people. They chose to do what was best for them. As I trudged through the mental, emotional, and financial consequences of their decision, I realized how every decision that we make affects other people for good and for bad. If we make decisions based exclusively on how it affects us, other people will get hurt. When we put the needs of others before our own, we help people. As Paul says, "Love does no harm to his neighbor."

So, it's time to ask ourselves "What kind of shape am I?" "Do I need to workout harder on the Love My Neighbor command?" I'd imagine that most of us do. We need to train our minds to think of how our actions will affect others. We should think, "How will my choices, behaviors, and attitudes affect my kids...my family...my friends...my neighbors? Do unsaved people see me trying to love God and obey His commands or am I living a hypocritical life? Do I challenge my fellow Christians to love and obey God or do I encourage them to compromise and sin? Will my kids say that I did what was best for them or for myself? Do I think of others or myself?" Prayerfully and honestly answering these questions is a good start to improving your spiritual fitness. Nothing is more important.