

Gym Class
“All In”
January 15, 2012

Good morning everyone. It's great to see you today!

As Ladell said, we are in the second week of this series ... which I'm calling "Gym Class" because, as I told you last week, at the beginning of 2011 I made a decision to invest some time and money into getting into better shape. I joined a gym, hired a physical trainer and, eventually, I even went on a diet.

In the process, I gained muscle and lost fat – over 25 pounds to this point ... which is good but only about half of my goal. In answer to the question raised by the song, "No. I'm *not* who I want to be just yet in terms of my physical transformation." However, even

though I'm not yet "there," over the past year I have learned some things from this experience about how God works in our lives to grow and change us in general.

Actually, it's probably overstating it to say that "I've learned some things" because the things I'm talking about are things that I've already known – spiritual principles clearly taught in the scripture. But I think what I've gone through has served to illustrate them for me in a new and fresh way. And because I think it's sometimes helpful for you to know what God is doing in my life, what He's teaching *me*, I decided to do this series. So, welcome again to "Gym Class." I hope you brought your tennis shoes.

Now, last week we began by looking at the principle of decision: *getting to the point in your life where you resolve that "I am going to change this about myself"* – whether it's

your weight, your attitude, your job, the way you relate to people, the way you practice your faith or anything else. We talked about why that matters – why it’s so important that from time-to-time we *do* reach that point. And then we looked at how (with God’s help) to make a good resolution that you’ll actually be able to keep. If you weren’t here, I encourage you to listen or watch online at our website.

Today, I want to talk about the second big “aha” I had over this past year; the second principle of growth and change which has become much clearer to me ... and that is the need to go “all-in” – to be *fully-engaged* on a *consistent basis* over the *long haul* in whatever process is necessary to get the result you desire.

Together, those three components – consistency, full-engagement and longevity – applied to any goal have an

incredible transformative power.

Now, that's probably not news. It's not something you've never heard before in one form or another.

But I want to talk to you about it this morning because the reason most of us fail to reach our goals is that, like the guy in the drama, we take the *exact opposite* approach – sporadic, halfway and short-term. “Oh no,” we say. “I'm not signing my life away. I'm keeping my options open. I'm not going to do anything that would get me stuck.”

Quite frankly, that's the approach I started with this time last year. I knew I needed to do something about my physical condition. I knew I needed to get into shape. I knew I needed to lose weight. But I also knew that *I wanted a quick fix* that didn't demand very much of me. I wanted a “magic pill” that

would, in a few short weeks (or maybe a couple of months), wipe out years and years of abuse and neglect on my part.

Can you relate to that? I'm sure you can because, as a pastor, I run into a lot of people who want a "quick fix" – and not just for getting in better shape. People who have spent years neglecting (or even mistreating) their spouse or years of being financially irresponsible or years not paying attention to their relationship with God, who finally come to a point where they decide they want their marriage or their finances or their heart to change. And they're dead serious about it. But they want it to happen overnight with a minimum amount of effort on their part. They want a magic pill or a miracle that will "make it all better" *right now*.

Unfortunately, however, both of those – magic pills and miracles - are in very short

supply.

And what happens for most people – and it almost happened to me – is that when things *don't* drastically improve with the sporadic, halfway, short-term approach, they quit. They assume “this is just too hard ... I'm never going to change ... this is just the way I am ... I'm such a loser.” Ever felt like that? I have.

But it doesn't have to be that way especially for those who are followers of Jesus. In fact, the Bible makes it quite clear that you and I, if we're followers of Jesus, are *not* losers.

To the Christians at Rome, Paul wrote:

*In all these things we are
more than conquerors
through him who loved us.
Romans 8:37 (NIV)*

To the Christians at Corinth he wrote:

*God has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. 2
Corinthians 2:14 (NIV)*

In God's sight, we're part of the divine victory parade!

Jesus himself said:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John
10:10 (NIV)*

See, if you feel like a loser ... if you're living your life as if you are some kind of a loser, I assure you – that perspective is *not* from God. It's the work of the thief – the enemy, the evil one, Satan and his minions. God intends for you to have a full and abundant

life that is growing and changing and becoming more of who He has made and called you to be.

But, to get there, you and I have to go all-in. In fact, that idea was one of Jesus' core teachings, and I'll give you just a couple of examples:

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62 (NIV)

In other words, you can't just get in halfway, "well, I've got to go *back* over here." If you get in, you get in.

He said:

"If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross

daily, and follow me” (Go all-in). Luke 14:27 (NET)

So, this morning I want to encourage you to go all-in in whatever area God has prompted you to make changes as 2012 begins. I want to encourage you to aim for consistency, full-engagement and longevity in whatever process it takes to bring about those changes.

Definitions

But I should probably spend a few minutes defining exactly what I mean by those terms. And I realize these definitions aren't dictionary-worthy, but they'll do for our purposes this morning.

By “consistency” all I mean is just showing up when you're supposed to show up.

Years ago, that great existential philosopher, Woody Allen, supposedly said “showing up is 80% of life.”ⁱ I think he’s a little high on his percentage, but I think he’s right in his basic conclusion. If you want things to happen, if you want things to change, you have to show up when you’re supposed to.

You know what a key difference is between someone who reaches a goal and someone who doesn’t reach a goal? The Bible tells us.

*The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.
Proverbs 13:4 (NIV)*

See, the sluggard and the diligent both have the same goals. They both want to lose weight. They both want to grow in their faith. They both want to be a better parent. They both want to start a business or get an education. The difference is that the diligent

person regularly shows up while the sluggard sleeps in.

*How long will you lie there,
you sluggard? When will you
get up from your sleep?
Proverbs 21:25 (NIV)*

Now, the answer the sluggard typically gives is “I just don’t feel like it today. I don’t feel any motivation.”

One of my favorite authors and a former pastor, John Maxwell, says ...

“The whole idea of motivation is a trap. Forget motivation. Just do it. Do it *without* motivation. And then, guess what? After you start doing the thing, that's when the motivation comes and makes it easy for you to keep on doing it.”ⁱⁱ

And I've experienced that over this past year – just showing up to work out. Going from “oh, I really don't want to go there,” to “I'm really glad I came.” Consistency – one of the core components of transformation – is just showing up when you're supposed to.

Now, by “full-engagement” I mean showing up when you're supposed to AND (when you do show up) *doing what it takes* to get the result you desire.

Obviously, this is a step beyond consistency. Full-engagement is applying yourself to whatever steps are necessary to reach your goal.

Although the Apostle Paul doesn't actually use the word, he describes this concept of full-engagement very well when he writes to the Corinthian Christians, he says:

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict

training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 1 Corinthians 9:25 (NLT)

Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.

"I'm not just showing up and doing whatever," Paul is saying.

No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (NLT)

"I'm fully-engaged in whatever process it takes for me to reach the goal God has set before all of his followers," Paul is saying, "which is to become more and more like

Christ.”

Ok, one more definition.

By “longevity” I mean showing up when you’re supposed to and doing what it takes for as long as it takes until you get the result you desire.

And this, obviously, is a step beyond full-engagement. It’s staying with the program – whatever the program is – *until you’ve achieved the goal*, whatever the goal is.

“Consider the postage stamp,” writes Josh Billings. “Its usefulness consists in the ability to stick to one thing until it gets there.” I love that.

And again, this is a critical part of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it:

Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.
Hebrews 12:1 (NLT)

Let us keep on keeping on until we finish this race.

As I was preparing and thinking about this verse and thinking about this whole idea of running with endurance and longevity, I was reminded of that scene in the Tom Hank's classic movie, *Forrest Gump*, right after Jenny – the love of his life – leaves him. Lucky for you, I was able to find this scene online. So, let's watch and enjoy.

VIDEO: Forrest Gump clip – “A Little Run” (2)

What a great movie that was. At the end of that scene, Forrest explains that he ran for 3½ years until he knew he was done. He had reached the end of his race.

Now, at this point, I'm very tempted to say, "Well, there you go. We're done this morning. Just go and apply those three qualities – consistency, full-engagement and longevity – to whatever goal you have. Go all-in: show up when you're supposed to and do what it takes for as long as it takes and you'll be fine." Tempted to say that.

And, in a way, I would probably be justified in saying that because the truth of the matter is that anyone can do that. In fact, *you've* already done it. *I've* already done it. We've already gone "all in" – we've consistently engaged in a lot of things over a long period

of time. And the result is ... *the life you and I are currently living right this minute. You and I are where we are today because we've gone all-in on whatever it is we've been doing to this point.* The question is ... are we happy with that result? Are we who we want to be?

If not, the problem with saying "now just go be consistent and fully-engaged over the long haul with whatever process will get you a new and better life" is ... well ... let me explain it like this:

One day this past week I was working out at Impact Fitness (by the way, they still have the great membership special running through the end of the month. If you go and sign up, I get a free month. Just throwing that out there).

I was working out and my trainer, Jonathan, was having me do a biceps exercise after having done a full complement of back

exercises. I was tired, kinda hurting, my shoulder was a little sore, and I wasn't doing it that well. Honestly, I just wanted to quit and I probably would have if Jonathan hadn't been there.

But I kept doing it and as I did, this question came to me: *why is it so doggone hard to move in the direction of improvement and excellence in our lives?* I mean, in that particular moment it would have been so much easier to say, "see ya, buddy, I'm out of here" and never even come back again. That would have taken zero effort on my part.

Have you ever noticed that in your life? That it's easy to settle for wherever you are now but hard to go beyond that? That it's easy to skip those final three reps, hard to finish them? Easy to eat more than you should; hard to say "no that's enough"? Easy to keep

treating people the way you've always treated them, even though it strains and damages your relationships; hard to be more loving and kind? Have you ever noticed that?

It's always an uphill battle to improve. Have you ever wondered why that is?

Without getting too deep theologically at this point, the Bible says it's because this world and everything in it – including you and me – is cursed by sin. And until Jesus comes back again and sets all things to rights, that's how it's going to be in every area of life. Order is going to naturally go towards disorder – not the other way around. It's going to be easy to keep sliding down, hard to improve. In fact, in some areas – specifically, certain diseases and the aging process – we're never going to turn it around completely until Jesus sets all things right.

So, for that reason, I can't just say, "Great, we're done this morning. Go and be consistent and fully-engaged over the long haul in whatever it takes and you'll fix whatever needs fixing in your life." I can't say that because *you and I need help* beyond just good advice and a pep talk (as important as those things are). If we're going to go beyond our typical sporadic, half-hearted, short-term approach to personal growth and change, we need help from "the gospel" – the good news that Jesus went around proclaiming.

Remember what he said? His main message?

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near (at hand). Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15 (NIV)

“Repent – change the way you think and therefore the way you live – and believe that through Me, God’s power is here and now.”

You see, every problem we have in this life stems ultimately from a wrong belief about ourselves or about the nature of life or about the goodness and power of God. There are things we think and feel that prevent us from going “all in;” things we think and feel that cause us to be sporadic instead of consistent, half-hearted instead of fully-engaged, and committed only for the short-term instead of the long-haul.

Three Battles

So, the question is ... what are those things? What kinds of thoughts and feelings are you talking about?

Well, obviously, they vary from person-to-person but for me, there are three of them. Three of them that come up over and over again. For me, this is where the battle is won or lost in my struggle to improve, to become more of the person I want to be and the person God wants me to be. This past year's attempt at physical transformation has made these three issues very clear to me.

I'll give you all three at once, very briefly:

1. Deception about my true condition (and what is truly required to address it).
2. Distress over what change is really going to cost me.
3. Discouragement concerning my failures and (apparent) lack of progress.

Deception. Distress. Discouragement. These are the battles I have to fight. And I would

suspect that these also apply to you in some form or another.

So, I want to talk to you about them for a minute, one at a time.

1. The first battle is with deception about my true condition and what is required to truly change it, specifically the thought that “I’m really not *that* bad off. I mean, come on, I’ve lost 25 pounds. I’m so much healthier than I was. I’m only overweight, not obese like I was. It won’t take *that* much effort. I don’t have to work *that* hard.”

For me, that thought undermines consistency. See, if you really believe that you’re not that bad off, eventually you’ll start to think: “Well, I don’t really need to show up *that* often. I don’t need to be there three days a week. It’s ok if I miss *this* workout. It’s ok if I cheat on my food today. It’s only one day, right?”

But eventually, as long as that thought persists, one day becomes two and two days become four and you stop going because now, in your head, "I'm a failure."

I read a couple of weeks ago, as I was thinking about this series, that studies have been done that show that people, when they're asked about how many calories a day they think they eat and how many calories per day they burn, people consistently underestimate the number of calories they eat, and overestimate the number of calories they burn. ⁱⁱⁱ That's not surprising – it's human nature to underestimate our deficiencies and overestimate our progress or our goodness.

But, progress comes from getting an honest assessment of how bad off you really are and then, repenting of believing that lie and believing the truth instead. Not until I start

believing the truth about where I really am and what really is required to fix where I am, do I start gaining the traction on the consistency that I need.

For me personally, this has been a great exercise this last year. I've had several things that have helped me see the truth about where I am physically ...

- a. Logging everything I eat via MyFitnessPal.com
(smartphone/internet)
- b. Getting on the scale every day.
- c. Having Jonathan measure my fat rolls with a set of calipers. It's embarrassing.

But, you know what? I know where I am. I know my condition, there is no lying to myself. What will help you see the truth in your life? Not just about your physical condition but your whole life? What's going

to help you with that? The Bible says that it is what does that for us.

The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

What it's saying is, you read this Bible or you have someone talk to you about what's in the Bible, and you get that in your head and it's going to show you who you are, where you are, what it's going to take. It will show you the truth about yourself. This is why it's so important, friends, to be consistent with church attendance and things like small group attendance and things like reading the Bible for yourself and praying.

I'm constantly amazed – and I don't say this

to be negative or critical, I just see it so much I'm amazed at it - at how many people who only show up at church twice a month (they're too busy or too tired) and they never go to a small group (who wants to hang out with boring church people), and they're confused about why they're not sensing God's presence in their life more or why they're not experiencing transformation. Transformation in Christ is just like any other transformation. It's the result of "a long and consistent obedience in the same direction."

2. The second battle is with distress over what change will cost me, specifically the thoughts that, "In this commitment I'm about to make - and I'm going to go all-in on this, I'm going to fully engage - I'm going to limit myself. And, when I limit myself, I'm going to give up on some things. And when I give up on some things, I'm going to lose out."

This one, for me, undermines full-engagement. If I believe that I'm actually

losing out in the deal – that, now I can't eat whatever I want (what a loss that is), now I can't do whatever I want or not do whatever I want (another huge loss) - well, if I believe I'm losing out by making those kinds of commitments, guess what? I'm not giving it my all. Why should I? I'd be stupid.

At some point, I have to stop believing that lie and start believing the truth that while full-engagement *sounds* limiting on the surface, Jesus says it's actually the path to more, to success, to growth and change.

He says, "Unless you forsake everything, unless you give it all up, you cannot be my disciples. Unless you lose your life you will not find it." And we hear that and we think, "oh, it's so negative. I've got to lose my life to follow Jesus. I've got to forsake everything."

No – that's not what he's saying. *In those*

statements ... Jesus said that giving up is what leads to more life, better life. "You don't just lose your life when you come follow me, you gain," Jesus said. He says, "Take my yoke upon you," and when we hear that we think, "oh, okay, Jesus is going to want me to change my life and act different, think different, talk different and put him first. And, he's probably going to want to get in my wallet. 'Take my yoke upon you,' oh, I've got to get in the yoke with Jesus." But, Jesus said, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." You follow me and you'll find rest for your souls. You won't be tired and worn out by all these other things that you're chasing after. See, the promise is that when we give up, we gain. And until we start believing that, we're not going to be able to fully engage.

And I had this become very vivid to me about four or five months after I began working out pretty consistently with Jonathan, and at the

very beginning, he said, "look, you're coming in here three days a week and you're paying me a lot of money every month to make you miserable. So, I'm going to tell you some other things you need to do outside of here. When we're done, I'm leaving (he's going to get a Big Mac, or something), and you need to do cardio for thirty minutes. And, then," he said, "you need to get this MyFitnessPal app and you need to start tracking everything you eat. You don't need to go crazy, find the number that lets you lose a pound per week and you need to log everything you eat." And I thought, he's crazy. I'm not going to do that, and besides, I wasn't in that bad of condition; I really don't need that. Lifting alone is going to transform me.

So, in June or July, I was in there one day and we were doing something and I said, "Jonathan, I've got to stop." And, I'm

lightheaded and sweating and I'm clammy. And he looked at me and said, "I think we're done for the day." This guy, he's treating me like I'm a 65 yr. old man (not that there's anything wrong with guys who are 65, but, *I'm not 65!*). So, I'm sitting there and it finally hit me – Why am I paying this guy this money and not fully engaging? Why am I thinking I'm smarter than him? Why am I thinking that, "Okay, I'll just work out here and I can eat like I want. I can not do cardio." And, it just kind of hit me, unless I fully engage ... I'm *not losing* by fully engaging, I'm going to gain. And, it was at that point that I said, Okay, give me that MyFitnessPal, and I started tracking everything, and *that's* when I began to lose weight, and gained in going towards my goal. I had this thought that I'm paying this guy all this money and I should do what he says.

It kind of reminded me of something that

Jesus once said.

Jesus said ...

*"Where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also."
Matthew 6:21 (NIV)*

I was putting my treasure into working with Jonathan and I said "I'm going to bring my motivation and my heart with me."

3. The final battle is with discouragement concerning my failures and (apparent) lack of progress, specifically the thoughts that "All this effort isn't making any difference at all" and "failure is fatal. I can't come back from this."

For me, this one strikes at the root of longevity. If it isn't making any difference, if whenever I fail (and I do fail) I can't come back from it, then why should I keep going? That's the thought.

But that's just wrong. It's a lie. Experience proves it.

I came across some incredible quotes.

"If I had to select one quality, one personal characteristic that I regard as being most highly correlated with success, whatever the field, I would pick the trait of persistence. Determination. The will to endure to the end, to get knocked down seventy times and get up off the floor saying, 'Here comes number seventy-one!'" Richard M. Devos

"People of mediocre ability sometimes achieve outstanding success because they don't know when to quit. Most men succeed because they are determined to." George E. Allen

Not only does experience prove it, nature reveals it. I came across this really cool quote while preparing for this message.

**“In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the stream always wins- not through strength but by perseverance.”
(pic of Grand Canyon)**

By hanging in there for the long haul. Amazing isn't it, what beauty a lot of time and a little effort can produce, isn't it?

But not only does experience prove it and nature reveal it, God himself promises it. He tells us that doing what's needed over and over and over really does make a difference, even though we may not see it at first. He says:

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking,

and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

*"You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not!
Matthew 7:7-10 (NIV)*

And then he tells us why.

So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him? Matthew 7:11 (NIV)

What's he saying? He is saying, this is a law of the universe. That God (who is good) has created the universe in such a way that

repeatedly doing good will ultimately result in good, even though there's a curse. You can count on it. So, don't quit, because your Heavenly Father is good.

Keep focused on the now because the progress is not easy to see at first.

Paul wrote:

We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2
Corinthians 4:16-18 (NIV)*

I read this article a couple of weeks ago about how you really do change from the inside out when you're losing weight. (<http://www.myfitnesspal.com/blog/neenaj33/view/you-really-do-change-from-the-inside-out-166220>). And, this is very encouraging to me because you can do all these things for a week or ten days or whatever, and some of you have seen this, you do it and then you go, "I haven't lost any weight. I feel fat and bloated. My jeans don't fit right." That's kind of girly – sorry. But, you have those thoughts. And I was reading this article and it said when you start changing, you change internally before you change externally. When you're overweight or obese, you have marbled fat on your muscles, and what happens is, when you start losing weight and getting in shape, that goes away first. And you don't see it externally because your changing the composition on the inside. It's

kind of like what Paul is saying here when he says don't fix your eyes on what is seen. Hang in there for the long haul.

Sometimes I look at Jonathan, my trainer (by the way, he is going to be here next week and you will get to meet him), and he's about the same height as I am, and I look at him and I think, "I am never going to look like he does." And, it's not really my goal, because this is what he does for a living. Where I am to where he is is so far. But the reality is, Jon has been doing this for 10+ years, every day. I've been doing it 3 times a week for a year. It's the long haul that makes the difference.

Conclusion

Well, anyway, those are some of the battles I have to fight and I think you can tell that I'm still kind of working through some of this stuff

on my own and trying to figure out what it all means and how it works for me. And, I hope it's helpful for you to hear it.

But let's talk about you as we close. I don't know what kind of resolutions you made coming into this year. I don't know what kind of changes you need to make. But I do know that God promises that ...

- admitting the truth about yourself, being real about where you are, is the beginning of consistency.
- believing that what you will receive for what you give up truly is a key to full-engagement.
- and hanging in for the long haul, even though it's an uphill climb, will make a difference.

And I also know that this is not some kind of wishful thinking. It's not some kind of pie-in-

the-sky bye-and-bye theology. This is true not because it's motivational, it's true because you can base your life (and death) on it because of Jesus. That's what he meant when he said the Kingdom of God – the power, the presence, the goodness of God – is near. It's proven in his presence, his power and his goodness, both in his life and his death and in his life taken up again in rising from the dead on the third day.

And if you want your life to change, friend, there is no better start than to go all-in with Christ and then go all-in on whatever he asks you to do. And, I want to pray for you to that end.

God, I just want to thank you that you do not leave us as we are – you love us as we are – but you do not leave us as we are. You call us forward and you show us truth about who we are. You

show us truth about how the world will really work if we'll trust you and walk with you and obey you.

God, I pray for some of the folks who walked in this morning who are discouraged about where they are, and thinking, "I'm never going to change. I'm never going to see this happen in my life. I'm a failure, and I'm a loser." God, I pray you would smack us in the head and say, "No! You are not a loser. You're more than a conqueror in Christ. Now trust me. Be persistent; Be consistent; Be in it for the long haul; Be fully engaged, because, they will pay off in your life."

God, I pray that you would give us the strength to do that. I pray that you would give us strength to take every day with that attitude. And we ask this

in Jesus' name, Amen.

Song – “Live Like You Were Dying” / Offering

Endnotes

ⁱ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Who_said_showing_up_is_half_the_battle

ⁱⁱ www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/68.John_C_Maxwell?page=2

ⁱⁱⁱ www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1914974-2,00.html