

Gym Class
Expert Advice
January 22, 2012

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

We picked that song because, for me, that song is a great way of describing where I was at this time a year ago: *wanting to be closer to free ... actually, needing to be closer to free ...* because I was so out of shape that I wasn't able to live the way I wanted to live.

So, in the first part of January, I drove over to a local fitness center to "investigate." In the same way when people come to our church for the first time, they don't want to make any commitments, they just want to come and investigate. Well, that's what I was doing. I

didn't want to make any *commitments*; I just wanted to *investigate*. At the time, I had no idea where that investigation was going to take me.

In fact, if you had told me a year ago that one year later I would have ...

- logged over 130 workouts
- lost about 7 inches off my waistline
- dropped 33 pounds of fat and added 12 pounds of muscle

... I would have said you were dreaming.

But, we took measurements last Wednesday, and that's exactly what's happened to me over the past year. And even though I still have a ways to go (my goal is to lose about 20 more pounds of fat and add 5 more pounds of muscle), I'm pretty pleased with my progress and I feel very confident about

the future. I feel like I'm getting "closer to free" physically speaking.

And a key factor in all of that, as Shannon said, has been the guy I hired to be my personal trainer. Of course, if you had told me a year ago that I was going to do *that* – to hire a trainer and pay him more money than I can afford, according to the skit, to make me feel miserable over and over and over, I would have said you were crazy. But that's exactly what happened and I'm glad I did it. And I want you to meet him this morning ... so, NHCC, would you please welcome a guy who I greatly appreciate and have grown to love over the past year (even though there are moments when I despise him and want to smack him!) ... Mr. Jonathan Dine – come join us.

<Jon comes to sit up front with me>

Interview w/Jonathan

And, before the first service this morning Jon said, "you just tricked me to get me to come to church." And I said, "Do you think I would do something like that?"

Anyway, I've asked Jon to join us because I want him to share his expertise with us as a physical fitness expert but, over this past year I've gotten to know Jon as more than a "physical trainer," so I asked him if he would send us a picture of his daughter, because,

Jon is also a dad. And this is his lovely daughter, Bella. <pic>

How old is she?

She'll be three in March.

And this is Jon being "daddy" <pic>

Where was that one on the left taken?

That's from the Plaza lighting ceremony. She had a great time.

One of the things that has really impressed me about Jon is his commitment to his daughter.

Jon is also interested in politics and has actually run for office and some of you may have voted for him.

This is a picture of Jon debating some pretty heavy hitters in the 2010 election.
<pic>

Tell us about that picture.

That's me debating Roy Blunt and Robin Carnahan. It was fun to be able to get up on stage and bring to light the issues that I feel are important, working against people that are the epitome of the career politician, who spend millions of dollars on their campaign,

and here I am, just a regular guy.

And you were running as a libertarian?

Yes, I'm a libertarian. And I got 58,000 votes – 3rd most successful in the country for a libertarian candidate.

And we hear a lot more about libertarian politics these days so Jon and I get to discuss that quite a bit as we work out.

Alright, let's talk about your *current* job ...

- How long have you been working as a personal-fitness trainer?

I've been a trainer for 14 years. I started when I was 18 years old, right out of high school.

- As a trainer, what do you enjoy most about your work?

I definitely have to say, helping

someone achieve their goals is rewarding. It's not only what happens to their body and their health but you see a change in their confidence levels and how they feel about themselves. Watching people be able to do ordinary activities, whether it's hitting a golf ball further or carrying groceries – it just makes it a little easier.

- What causes you the greatest frustration in working with clients?

I'd say dealing with people's self-limiting beliefs. A lot of people have beliefs in their head that aren't based in reality. Whether it's "I'm too old to get in shape" or "I'm too out of shape to get in shape" or "I can't eat nutritious food." A lot of people have these

beliefs and need help shattering them so they can start to believe that they can accomplish their goals.

- From your experience, what are the top two or three reasons people fail to reach their fitness goals?

A lot of people fail through frustration. They believe it's going to happen overnight, that they can come in a few times a week, and boom, they'll be in shape. It really takes consistency to realize the goals, so I sometimes get frustrated when people are unable to commit to it. Rick is one of the more obedient clients – he shows up to all of his workouts. There was a time in the beginning when I had to light a fire under him to get him to eat more nutritious foods

when we started figuring out calories. Choosing the right foods was sometimes difficult for him; he'd pick donuts in the morning instead of something healthier.

- If you could only *give one piece of advice* to anyone who is trying to get into better shape, what would it be?

To get started. Tomorrow is always a day away so the biggest thing is to get started today and be consistent, no matter what life throws at you, persevere and keep pushing through. I always say the best way to predict your future is to create it. You've got to take the steps; you've got to take the actions to get the goals you want. Fitness is a journey – it's not a destination. You don't just arrive at

fitness. It's something you work at, you excel towards.

- I thought you were going to say that they should hire you, that that would be the one piece of advice.

Well, professional assistance does make a big difference. When you work with a personal trainer you can learn his knowledge, take on his values which allows you to invest in your own education. A building is only as tall as its foundation. The more you understand and the more comfortable you feel in a gym, the more likely you are to succeed.

- In case there are people who would like to hire you, are you accepting new clients?

Of course. If anybody here wants

to, I'll give you a free consultation. You can come in and we'll sit down and find out what kinds of goals you have, take some measurements, do some tests, put you through a workout, see where you are now and see how long it will take you to get to where you want to be.

- After the service, we'll be hanging out here, and you've got some brochures with information on how people can contact you. So, anyone can stop by and visit and we'll talk about that.
- And, the last thing on the agenda is that we might have a gun show today. We have to do this together.

I keep telling him he has to exercise his 2nd Amendment rights – his right to bear arms!

Thanks Jon! <Jon sits>

I also want to mention again the fitness center where we work out - Impact Fitness

It's a really good gym and a really good group of people running it. *Impact* is located on Vivion Road in Riverside but next month they're opening a second location at 64th Street in the Tuileries Plaza. They're running a New Year's special right now that will save you \$100 on an annual membership.

Now, as I said in the very first week, the point of this series is to use the experience of *physical transformation* to illustrate and reinforce principles of *spiritual transformation*. As I've gone through the process of seeing major changes take place in my body, it's given me new insight on how God works to change our lives in general.

- In the first week, we talked about the fact that, if you're a follower of Jesus, God expects that you will grow and change. There's no such thing, according to the New Testament, as a Christian who is not on some path of continuous growth and improvement in their life.
- Then, last week we talked about going "all in" on whatever resolution it takes to get to that point; being consistent, like Jon was saying, being fully-engaged over the long haul in that process that is going to produce the change in your life. And we talked about how we sometimes have to battle with deception or distress or discouragement. You've got to win those battles if you're going to get to where you are going.

If you missed either of those services, as usual the message is posted on our website and you can check it out there if you wish.

The Value of a Trainer

Now today, obviously, we're going to talk about the value of a trainer – the importance of someone who knows a lot more than you and who can give you expert advice as you seek to grow and change. And I have to say that, of the four major lessons I've learned over the past year through this experience, this is the one that has surprised me the most. Again, if you had told me back in January 2011 that by January 2012 I would have invested so much time and money in having someone like Jonathan help me, I would have said "no way" ...

... for two reasons:

1. I overestimated my own competency
2. I underestimated the value of a trainer

The only reason I even started working with Jonathan in the first place was because it was free. Do you remember that, Jon?

They had a special deal for anyone who joined in January. You got a couple free sessions with a trainer and then you could sign up for a one-month deal at a reduced cost after that. At the time I thought, "OK, I'll take the free sessions. It's been about 10 years since I've been a member of a gym and it'll be good to have someone remind me how to use the equipment. Not that I really *need* it ... not that anybody so *young* like Jonathan could have anything of value to teach me (he's twenty-some years younger than me; I'm sure you've figured that out by looking at us), but, hey, it doesn't cost

anything. Might as well do it.”

Now, what’s crazy about that is there I was – an old fat guy who could hardly get in and out of his car without breaking a sweat – and here’s Jon, who looks like ... well, you saw him ... and he does this for a living. But I was actually thinking, “I don’t really need somebody like him to help me. I can figure it out all by myself.”

But once we started working out, I soon realized that not only was there a bunch of stuff I didn’t know, there were things I didn’t know *that I didn’t know!* That’s how dumb I was in this area.

I remember the very first time Jonathan had me do something with free weights: I think it was a simple bench press like this. <pic of huge lifting>

Not really. 😊

Actually it was more like this. <smaller lift>

The first time he had me do that, I didn't know *how* to do it because I'd never worked with free weights in my life. And I was wobbling and my muscles were shaking and I felt like I was just going to lose control. But Jon wasn't worried. "Oh, that's normal," he said. "Your small muscles are the ones that do the balancing for you and they just don't have any strength yet."

And I thought, "Wow ... I didn't know that. Heck, I didn't even know *I had* smaller muscles. That's kind of cool!"

A few interactions like that in the "free sessions" plus the fact that Jon is an easygoing kind of guy whose fun to be around and I thought, "Well, maybe I'll just do this month thing at the reduced cost ...

and then after that I'll be on my own."

At the end of that month, I thought, "You know, this *is* pretty valuable instruction, I'm learning things here ... so I think I'll go for the three month plan at the full price" which was the commitment you had to make to keep going. "But, after that," I told myself, "I won't need him anymore. I'll be good to go on my own."

But when May rolled around, I signed up for another three months. And then in September I did it again. And then, in December, I did it again. And it's in the 2012 budget for at least the first six months, and if history is any indication, I'll probably figure out how to do it for the last six months.

So, what happened? How did I get from "I don't really need this kind of help; I can figure it out on my own" and "this guy really

won't show me that much" to writing a check every month?

Well, here's what happened

The answer is that I finally got an *accurate appraisal* of both my own competency and the value of a personal trainer.

I finally saw the truth and, as Jesus once put it "you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

See, the truth about me ... the accurate appraisal of me, especially in this area of my life, is that *I can't do it by myself*. I've proven it time and time again. If I *could* do it by myself, I *would've already been* doing it by myself. But, I wasn't.

About a week ago, we were working out and I was miserable, and I was looking around in the gym at all the other people who come in

and who seem to be so disciplined on their own. And I was a little jealous because the truth about *them* is that they don't need help like I do. They don't need someone like Jonathan. But, like it or not, the truth about me is that ... I do. I will not do it on my own and, furthermore (this is even worse) I will not do it unless I'm putting a significant amount of money into it. Remember, Jesus made that statement - where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. You put your money into it and you show up.

Now, beyond an accurate assessment of my limited competency, the other reason I've continued is that *I've also come to appreciate the value of having a personal trainer*. In fact, what Jonathan brings to the table in this, for me, is worth way more than what I pay him. (But, he's not listening to that part because he's not going to raise his rate on me ... right?).

But, that's true. In fact, as I was planning this series, I tried to think of some of the specific things that Jonathan does that are really helpful to me; things that I need and *things that I didn't even know I needed* when I started out, but that I have come to value. And when I say "I value these things," I really mean it not only because of the change that's happening in my body, but because what I'm doing in the gym these days is not easy. I'm working my body *hard* – harder than I ever have in my life. And that's a very good thing.

So, here's my list – and I know that some of you who also have a personal fitness trainer could say these same things about the person you work with. But, here's my list.

The first one I've already alluded to:

1. Jon gives me expert advice and direction.

Specifically, he tells me to do things that I would not even think of doing or don't want to do *that will serve to build me up and increase my strength..*

For example, for the first nine months or so – and I don't know why we did it this way; maybe you realized what a weakling I was - whenever we'd do ab crunches (which we do at the end of almost every workout), a lot of times we'd use a ball like this one.

<Picture of ball>

You lay back on it and you go up and down like the guy in the picture. It's a little bit hard but it doesn't kill you.

Well, about two months ago, for some reason (I made him mad or something) Jon

decided I needed to do something different with *this* kind of a ball.

<picture of half-ball>

I don't know what idiot thought a ball like that was a good idea, but I'm not kidding – the first half-dozen times I couldn't do it without falling off the ball. I was wobbling and I was so frustrated. And it hurt a lot more than the other ball.

But every workout, Jon made me do 20 reps with my hands on my chest, then 20 more of the bicycle crunches like the guy in the picture, then off the ball onto my back for 15 90-degree leg lifts. Then the whole routine two more times.

It was very hard and *it hurt*, and somewhere in the middle, I'd say, "I hate this." He'd say, "Oh, did you say you love this?" And I'd want

to smack him.

But you know what? I can do it now. And I'm actually starting to get some definition in my abs that I've never had before. Of course, 14% of my 15% body fat is covering it so it's hard to see just yet (I'm not going to show you) but I'm getting there.

Here's the second thing that's helpful to me ... and I know this is really obvious, but it makes a difference.

2. Jonathan is there *with me* while I'm working out.

At least most of the time that's the way it is – sometimes he'll have another client right after me, so he'll give me stuff to do to finish up on my own plus there's always "cardio" – which is another thing I hate. (Riding a bike and going nowhere? Who thought *that* was a good idea?)

Anyway, the value of Jon being with me is twofold.

- First, it's just nice to have company when you're doing something hard. We talk about lots of stuff that's not really related to working out.
- Second – and this is probably the most important thing – having Jon with me matters so much because *so many times I would quit if he wasn't there*. So many times, when I'm on the third set of something and I have five more reps to go, if he wasn't standing there *saying "five more," I'd say, "ah, that's good enough. I worked really hard on this one."* But, if I understand correctly how things work, it's *those last five reps* that are literally the highest leverage reps in terms of muscle development. And

because Jonathan is there counting down for me, I hang in as long as I can and I get the maximum benefit.

And that leads to the third thing I've noticed about having Jon help me.

3. He stretches me but he doesn't break me.

Part of the way he does that is by paying attention to how I'm progressing and responding in the moment, which makes him sensitive to what my limits are. And if I get to the point where I just can't do it anymore – I reach the point of muscle failure where there's just nothing left – he says, "OK, that's good enough. Let's rest for a minute." And then we resume or move on to something else.

On the flip side of that coin, he's also sensitive to the fact that I'm getting stronger

and it takes more to stretch me. Sometimes I'll kind of taunt him a bit after a set and say something like "man, that was easy."

In fact, Thursday evening I was in there and we were doing a leg workout.

I was doing the incline leg press (where you sit in a machine like that and push the weights up) <pic> ...

... and Jon threw two weights of 45 pounds onto the 45 pound bar and I did 15 lifts of those 135 pounds.

I was feeling strong and I said "shoot, that was easy." So, he threw two more plates on and said "do 12."

And I did and I said "that was easy." So, he threw two more on and said "do 8."

And I did and I said, "OK, that one was

hard” because it was. But instead of stopping at that point (which is what I would have done), he threw on *two more* 45s for a total of 405lbs and said “do 6.”

And I was thinking to myself, “Oh boy, I shouldn’t have said anything. I’m not sure I can do this.” But I did. The last rep was right at the edge, but 405 pounds was far more than anything I’ve ever done. And, I have to tell you, I was pretty happy about that. I was pretty proud of myself.

Of course, I haven’t been able to walk for the last three days and it still hurts like heck ... but that kind of pushing the limit – of being stretched – is exactly what I need if I’m going to get stronger.

Ok, quickly, two more things about Jonathan which I’ve discovered to be very valuable in the process:

4. He has done it himself ... obviously, as you can tell by looking at him ...

... which means that he's not asking me to do anything he hasn't already done, in one form or another, *thousands of times* before I ever showed up on the scene. And there's a great credibility in that. In fact, a lot of times when I get to the gym, Jon is there working out himself. Of course, it is a little embarrassing that he's working out with these massive weights and, when I get there, we switch to the mini-weights for me ...

But it goes beyond credibility in my mind. Because he's done it himself, I'm also confident that *he understands what I feel like* even though I'm just a beginner by comparison. He's been doing it for 14 years and I've been doing it barely over a year. He understands what it feels like to be tired or frustrated with lack of progress or to wonder

if it's even worth it to show up and do it again tomorrow. He understands what it feels like to have victory and to see progress.

And that leads to the final thing that I appreciate, which is that ...

5. He is gracious – he accepts me as I am. I don't ever feel any kind of judgment or condemnation, even when I'm not doing so good or when he asks me what I ate and I tell him. He accepts me as I am (but he wants me to be more than what I am!)

Because he knows what it's like, he has a lot of patience when I fail. A lot of times on the third exercise of a particular muscle-group, I'll say something like, "Man, that was hard" or "that hurt" or "I'm tired."

And Jon will say, "You *should* be tired. You're moving a lot of weight."

Of course, in reality, I'm moving a lot of

weight *for me*. For him it's nothing. But he doesn't belittle me for that. He's gracious. "It's OK to be where you are right now. But you're not staying there. Let's go this way."

So, that's my list of what I've discovered to be valuable about having a personal fitness trainer.

1. He gives me expert advice and direction.
2. He's there *with* me.
3. He stretches me but he doesn't break me.
4. He's done it himself.
5. And he is gracious about how he deals with me.

And, Jon, I really want to thank you for your investment in me and I appreciate what

you've done for me. I can't thank you enough. Thank you.

But beyond that, as I said earlier, this whole process has illustrated for me how God works in our lives to bring about growth and change in general. And I suppose one application at this point would be for me to say to you, "Hey, folks, in what areas of your life do you need to grow and change? If you're really serious ... if you really want to see that happen, then you have to find someone who can give you expert advice ... and then follow it."

It's amazing to me how many people overestimate their competence and underestimate the value of an expert in things like marriage or raising children or interpersonal relationships or personal financial management. "Ah, I can figure that stuff out on my own. Buying and reading a

book ... or going to some silly class (like the *Freed-Up Financial Living* class we just started) ... or going to a counselor – I don't really need that."

As a pastor, I see it all the time: so many people think they can just show up to life and "do whatever comes natural to them" and expect to be successful. And what I see is, at best, they miss out on the life they could be living. At worst, they wind up in an emotional or relational or financial ditch somewhere.

I mean, if an expert can make this kind of a difference in physical training, why wouldn't the same thing be true in every area of life? And maybe that's what you should take away from this message. *If you're struggling in some area, swallow your foolish pride and go get some help – maybe even spend money on it, if that's what it takes!*

Heart & Soul Training

But I want to go another step beyond that because another thing I see as a pastor is that a lot of people think the same way about matters of the heart and the soul and the spirit. I'm sure you see it, too, because the attitude is so prevalent in this culture. When people start talking about God and spiritual things, they say, "You know, you just need to figure that out on your own, you've got to follow your heart. You just need to trust your intuition. You just need to listen deeply to that inner voice and let it guide you."

Like somehow that intuition or voice inside you is going to give you better advice about spiritual matters than it has about your physical or relational or emotional or financial life?! *That's craziness.* Following where my heart naturally led me is how I got to weigh over 200 pounds (with 60 pounds of

that being fat) *and* it's how I convinced myself that "Oh, I'm really not in that bad of shape."

Seriously? Are you kidding me?

This is why, I think, the Bible says things like:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. (It tells us things that sound good but that aren't necessarily trustworthy) Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

And ...

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought (don't act like your little voice or your intuition is so much better than the rest – they're not), but rather think of yourself with sober judgment

(do an accurate appraisal).
Romans 12:3 (NIV)

And ...

The hearts of men and women are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.
Ecclesiastes 9:3 (NIV)

In other words, "left to their own devices, people will do insane things, and then convince themselves they're sane ... and then they die."

And this is why the Bible also says ...

Train yourself to be godly
(train yourself in matters of the spirit; train yourself in what it means to know God; train yourself in what it means to have the character of God)

being built in your life), for *physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

1 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)

In other words, "if you care about your heart and soul and spirit, if you're concerned about relating to God," Paul is saying, "don't fall for the deception that you can just do whatever comes natural to you. Find a trainer. Find someone who can direct you and keep you from going into the ditch."

"Well, Rick, who might be able to do something like that? Who would you recommend? Yourself?"

No. Not me. At least, not directly.

I would recommend you go directly, on your

own, personally, to the Head Trainer of Hearts and Souls and Spirits. And the trainer I'd recommend you sign up with is Jesus of Nazareth. He's accepting new clients – He's re-signing old clients – all the time.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened (all of you who are looking at your life and going, "I wish I was closer to free. I wish I didn't feel like this. I wish I wasn't caught up in this pattern of life that's destroying me.") Come to me and I will give you rest (new energy). Take my yoke upon you (get in step with me) and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-29 (NIV)

See, Jesus wants to be your trainer and mine. And let me tell you why he's such a great trainer ... why you should go "all in" with him. I think you'll see the analogy here.

1. Jesus will give you expert advice and direction.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus once said ...

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock." Matthew 7:24-25 (NLT)

Jesus is saying, "follow my direction; listen to my advice and you will be solid."

A lot of times, Jesus, in that direction and advice, will tell you things that you would never think of yourself, things that you don't even want to do. But I can guarantee you and I can verify that this is true in my own life, in areas of my life where I have listened to Jesus and implemented what he said ... I am solid. In the areas where I haven't ... I'm weak. I've caused pain to myself and to the people around me.

Jesus is a great heart and soul trainer, and that's one reason.

Here's another reason why Jesus is such a great trainer:

2. He will be there *with* you all the time.

"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:20 (NIV)

God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)

Jesus will be with you when you make him the head trainer in your life. Here's the cool thing about it, he wants to do more with you than just work with you and improve your life. He wants a relationship with you. He wants you to know Him. He wants to know you. And, just like a physical trainer, he will encourage you when you feel like quitting ... in those moments when you feel like, "this isn't worth it; it's hard, it's discouraging; I feel like I'm all alone; I feel like nobody else is going on this journey with me. I feel like it's all up to me." He says he'll be with you and he'll encourage you.

Of course, a good question is "how does Jesus do this? He's not walking next to me.

You know, Rick, when you show up to training, Jon is there and you see him and you talk to him. How does that work with Jesus?"

Well, actually, it works three ways, two I'll tell you right now: The Bible. The Bible contains the story of God's activity in this world. It contains the words that Jesus left to his disciples. And in those words, as we read the Bible, we understand the mind of Christ, Paul says. And we can have that mind in our own mind. So, in that way, Jesus is with us and is training us.

And, then, there's the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "when I leave, I'm going to send the Comforter, and he's going to come and he will actually live inside you. And he will speak the words to you that I have already taught and remind you of these things that I've taught."

So, those are two ways that Jesus is with you.

I'll tell you the third one in a minute but let's move to the third reason why Jesus is such a great trainer and why you and I ought to invite him to do that. And that's because ...

3. He will stretch you but not break you.

The Bible says ...

He knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. Psalm 103:14 (NIV)

In other words, he remembers that we're human beings. We're not God. We're not divine. We don't have the same power and resources that he does. So, he knows what our limits are.

And it says that ...

God is faithful; he will not let you be tested beyond what you can bear. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

And that's a good thing because when you sign up to follow Jesus, your life doesn't get easier. A lot of times it gets harder because now you're swimming upstream, not just going with the flow and doing whatever comes natural like everybody else. You're saying, "No, I'm listening to a different voice and I'm following a different direction." And *that's hard*. It stretches you.

But like a good trainer, Jesus, makes good use of those hard things. And those things serve to grow you and change you.

And we'll talk more about that next week in the last message of this series which I'm calling "Hurts So Good" (which is what

Jonathan says whenever I complain about the pain). You won't want to miss it.

Another huge, huge reason why Jesus is a great soul trainer – and I love this one – is that ...

4. He has done it himself.

There's an amazing passage in the letter to the Hebrews. It says ...

Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. Hebrews 5:8-9 (NLT)

A lot of people think it's the other way around. They think, "well, Jesus didn't have

to learn anything, you know, he was already God. I mean, when he became a man, the fix was in. He couldn't have sinned if he wanted to because he was God. He couldn't really feel pain. He knew he was going to die but it wasn't that big of a deal because he knew that three days later he was going to rise again." In other words, Jesus was just going through the motions. That's what a lot of people think was happening.

But Paul makes it very clear that that's not true. He writes to the Philippians that when God decided to become a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, he laid aside his divine rights, he laid aside his divine powers, and he lived the same way you and I live. He had to live a life of faith and trust the exact same way that you and I do. So, what He tells us to do ... he has already done. And that means that he understands what it feels like to be tired or to be frustrated with a lack of

progress or to wonder if it's worth it. He understands what it feels like to have victory and to see progress.

Because of that, we can be confident that *he understands us, what we feel like, even though we're beginners by comparison.*

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. Hebrews 4:15-16 (NLT)

... which leads to the final reason why Jesus is a great soul trainer, and I'm sure you've already guessed this, because ...

5. He is gracious – he will accept you as you are (but he wants you to be more than what you are!)

One of Jesus' best friends on earth – the Apostle John – wrote this about Him:

The Word became flesh (God became a man) and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

Jesus is full of grace and truth.

That means simply that Jesus loves you the way you are. There's nothing you can ever do to earn his love and acceptance and there's nothing you can do to lose his love and acceptance. It's free. He paid for it on the cross. That's grace. But there's more to Jesus than grace – there's also truth. And if

you sign up with Jesus, you're going to get grace, but you're going to get truth. What will happen to you is what has happened to me working out with Jon. The more I work out the more I go, "gosh, I didn't realize I was fat there. I didn't realize I couldn't do that." You begin to see even how much further you are from perfection and how much further you have to go, and yet, it's in the context of grace. Jesus loves you and he's accepted you and there's nothing you can do to lose that.

Conclusion

Well, this is why you ought to sign up with Jesus, friend. And if you've already signed up, this is why you ought to go all in - your life will change because,

1. He gives expert advice and direction.
2. He's there *with* you.

3. He stretches you but he doesn't break you.
4. He's done it himself.
5. And he is gracious.

"Well, that's really cool, Rick. What an interesting analogy, that Jesus is kind of like the head trainer. So, how do I sign up?" Well, like I talked about earlier, you've got to do the accurate appraisal of yourself. You've got to look at yourself and say, "I'm not as competent as I thought I was. And, I've way underestimated the value of a relationship with Jesus." In just a minute when we close this message, I will walk you through how to do that.

But, some of you are sitting here, "Well, I've already done that. How do you do this 'all-in' thing? You talked about going all-in with goals last week, but how do you go all-in with Jesus?" It's the same way. You

consistently show up and fully engage with him over the long haul.

And that leads to the third way we connect with Jesus and experience the presence of Jesus. And that is through being part of a church.

There's a lot of thinking in this culture, even Christians who have known Jesus for a long time, "Well, I don't really need church or the Bible to know and worship God. On Sunday morning you can just go out to the golf course, you know, you're out in nature and you sense God and feel God," and all that stuff. Sometimes I play golf with guys (not guys from church) and we'll get into a conversation and they find out I'm a pastor and they'll say "I kind of worship God on the golf course," and I'll go, "look, Buddy, I've been watching your game, and the way you reacted to how terrible you're playing – you

ain't worshipping God right now. That's the truth about you."

A lot of people say, "I can go worship God at the lake." Seriously? Is that what you do? Maybe you can do it, but I can't. What I have discovered about myself is that I need somebody to push me because I am lazy. And I bet a lot of you are, too. And this is the goal of the church.

Paul writes:

These are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-12 (NLT)

In other words, we've got to be involved in this if we're going to be built up because these people all push us.

And, he also says it's not just the pastors and teachers who are helping us do this. Paul continues:

He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)

See, being connected with other people in the church, in the body of Christ, is part of what pushes you to grow.

So, let's wrap this up. I'll get off my soapbox.

Friend, you can know God. You really can.

You can walk with God. You can be transformed into the kind of person God wants you to be. He's already done the hard part – he paid your debt and mine when he died on the cross; paid for our sins. And he will work with you the rest of the way by being your personal heart and soul trainer. So today could be the greatest day of your life – the day you decide to say "yes" to Jesus, and say, "Okay, I get it. I get why I need you. I'm signing up."

As we close this morning our band is going to do a song that we chose because we hope it will provide time to reflect. As they sing, listen to the lyrics and let God speak to you about what you need to do. He's calling you. He's inviting you. Will you say yes?

Let's pray.

God, I thank you, as always, that you do

not leave us in the dark about who you are and what you want for us in this life. And, there are people who walked in here today who just need to say "yes," who've just floundered around in their life, and it's all because they don't have the foundation. The building is not built from a good foundation. They just need to say "yes" to you and say, "Jesus, I'm overestimating my goodness. I'm overestimating my capability and I've underestimated what you can do for me. So, I want to say 'yes,' I want you to be my savior. I want to follow you. Would you come into my life and begin making me into a new person. Train me."

God, some of us, we said that a long time ago, but we're not all-in. We're just dabblers. We dabble in church; we dabble in Bible study; we dabble in all these things just like we dabble in

exercise or dieting. And we've just got to cut the crap and say, "I'm following you. I'm all-in." God, I pray some of us would say that this morning. We've got to stop pretending and lying to ourselves and acting like we've got it all together when we don't.

God, let us be able to be all-in with you this morning and that you would become our trainer in every way. And, we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Closing Song – "Faithful God"

Endnotes