

(“Watch, Acept, Invest, & Team”)

For Relational Fitness, Body & Soul

WARNING!

- Always consult a physician before beginning an exercise program
- Contents are explicitly Christian and may result in life-changing perspectives on God, fitness, and your personal relationships

Devotional and Workout Edition

(9 April 2013)

To Mom and Dad for living your faith in our hectic family business with humility and commitment to Christ. Your practical and faithful witness prepared me for Life!

To Mark Thompson, my first mentor in Christ, for lovingly challenging my 'personal theology' by asking, "Where do you see that in God's Word?" Your gentle confrontation inspired me to begin a lifelong quest for Truth in God's Word.

To Wes Alford, my college and seminary roommate and dear friend, for your authentic passion for Truth, music, laughter, family and even bean dip! ROFL!! You inspired me to live for Jesus every moment. Anything less is just religion.

To Tom Waynick, Jeff Voyles and Stephen Muse, mentors in counseling and mindfulness, for lovingly nudging my closed mind and self-protected heart until I could no longer remain as I was. And when I began to unravel, you stayed with me to begin a glorious new journey that I hope will never end.

To Dan Rose, counselor to my wife and I, during one of the toughest years of our lives. You helped us hear our love for each other on the other side of our fears. God used you to bring a greater depth and joy to our marriage.

To Jae Park, Shon Severns, and Jeff Zust - friends and co-workers who provided helpful specific feedback on earlier versions for greater clarity & practicality.

*And to my Lauren. There are not enough words. My eyes still tear up that "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine".
Yes, I'm a girly man - but I'm your girly man!*

The views expressed in 'W.A.I.T. training' are my own and do not necessarily reflect the beliefs or practices of the organizations in which I work or worship.

This Devotional and Workout edition flows out of the Bible Study and Workbook edition. Although some of the introductory material is replicated here, I recommend the companion work for a fuller understanding of the concepts.

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'JD Dillard', with a stylized, cursive 'JD' monogram.

Jeff Dillard

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Relational Fitness, Body and Soul

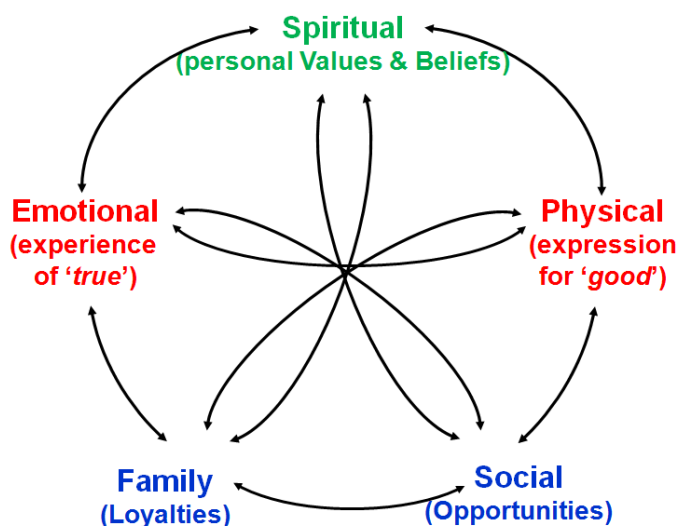
After years of counseling singles, couples, families, white collar and blue collar workers, and homemakers of all kinds of races, religions and cultures, I find that most of us focus on only part of our problems: our emotions *or* beliefs *or* actions in relationships. But God created us to live as *whole* people.

W.A.I.T. training proposes practical ways to do that by self-awareness of body and soul, genuine expression, and mutual help through small groups of Bible study, fellowship and physical exercise. Why exercise? Because our body is an *instrument of our soul* (see Genesis 2:7, bodily expressions of the soul in Psalm 119, Romans 6:16, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, James 2:26, etc.), and His Word provides at least 24 physical principles to guide our spiritual fitness. Why *group* exercise? Because God's people are the *Body* of Christ (Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12ff, Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:12-16, 5:23, Colossians 1:18-24), so He calls us to grow *together*.

In Christ, you'll begin growing as a whole person as you Watch your body in times of physical & relational stress, and Acept what you experience as spiritual realities in you, *but* Invest in real Life according to the Word of God, and Team with the Body of Christ for real growth and joy!

The first two are for a deeper *individual experience* of your body for self-awareness of your soul. The second two are for a more helpful *relational expression* in His Body for unity in Christ. Without the first process, we may not fully grasp what our soul truly values and the associated deep hopes and hurts. Without the second, we cannot fully live God's will because He *is* relational: Father, Son and Spirit. But like any kind of worthwhile growth, it won't be easy. Ready to get started?

In 2011, the U.S. Army began a program that may help us understand God's design for relational fitness, body and soul. Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) names five areas of our lives that affect our ability to bounce back from hardships: spiritual, emotional, physical, family and social resilience. And *each* of these areas affects *all* of the others *all* of the time. CSF doesn't seem to prioritize the areas, but I've set them in a specific arrangement with parenthetical descriptions to help us see the practical intent of God's design for the body and soul.



Look over the design for a few minutes before you turn the page. Then share some of your thoughts with your group. Don't worry about 'getting it right'. Just work on building understanding of each other and trust in each other. If you're not in a group yet, write your thoughts in a notebook.

If you have a color copy of the image, note that the colors highlight three distinct areas of our life: our **body** that works like a thermometer (measuring 'heat') and thermostat (making desired changes) to connect our **soul** to our **relationships**.

In a few minutes, I'll come back to this image to discuss practical applications for self-awareness of body and soul in relationships in the Body of Christ. But I'm aware that this graphic, the concepts (such as "self-awareness") and talk of living as "whole" people may be confusing, even weird. So I offer a second design that might help clarify how our body and soul interact practically in relationships. On the next page is a picture of our 4 basic 'modus operandi' (ways of operating).

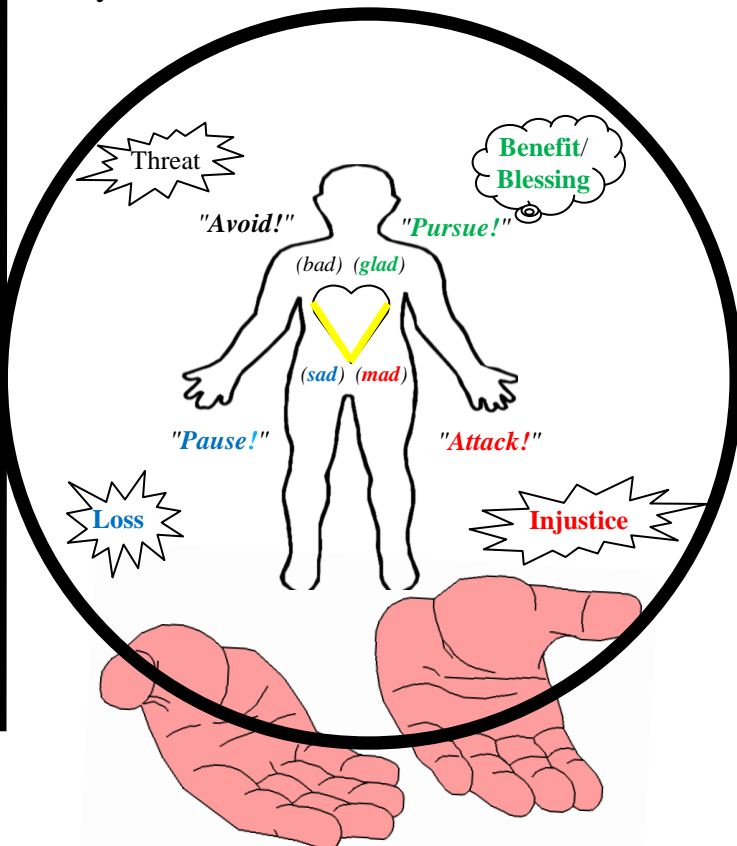
The "V" inside the heart and the small-cased "b" around the person picture our spirit's concerns. The "b" represents what we believe about our world. Not THE world, just OUR world that we perceive has impacted us personally (or will). It's a small-cased "b" because it may only be our perception. Is the threat, benefit, loss or injustice *real*, right *here* and *now*? Maybe. Maybe not. But this is sure: whatever we believe about our world flows from what we *value* in our *spirit*. Jesus calls these our 'treasure'. (Matthew 6:21) I colored the "V" in the heart gold/yellow to cue us to wonder, "are my treasures 'solid gold' to be valued or 'caution lights' signaling danger?"

Every Christian values some Good and (due to our sinful nature) some self-destructive things. But under stress we tend to focus on whatever we feel most powerfully in the relational context. The hands remind us that each of us always perceives our world to be in someone's hands. There are two hands to remind us of two types of relationships with different levels of trust and commitment: 'family' (by blood or choice) for loyalties or 'social' circles for opportunities. Think about that.

If you were to "re-spect" (re-look) what you are valuing, who seems to be holding your world, and how you are responding, how could that change your beliefs and feelings?

Our bodies, like thermometers, measure the ‘heat’ of feeling bad (afraid), mad, sad or glad when we’re focused on our treasure in someone’s hands. Emotions (from the Latin, ‘emovere’, “to move”) cue our bodies to act as thermostats to move us back or forward. ‘Bad’ and ‘sad’ want movement backward. ‘Mad’ and ‘glad’ want movement forward.

E.g., if we believe one of our treasures is threatened, we feel ‘bad’ and tend to *avoid* the threat; if we believe one of our desire treasures is available as benefit to us, we feel ‘glad’ and tend to *embrace* or *pursue* it; if we believe one of our treasures is lost, we feel ‘sad’ and tend to *pause*; if we believe one of our treasures is violated, we tend to *attack*. But do we always value Good treasures, and are our beliefs always True?



But it's hard to wait (pun intended for W.A.I.T. training) to re-evaluate what our soul loves in order to be strengthened or to change. Still, ignorance or stubbornness hinders our self-awareness and intentional relationships in the Body of Christ. So where should we start? It might help for us to go back to the graphic on page 7 and consider some images you might have seen in that design. Many have seen a flower, starfish, sand dollar or stickman. Let's talk about these and resilience.

Flowers are beautiful, and resilient people have a beauty about them, too. We enjoy being around them because they're strong but sensitive; they have open minds but also conviction; and they give themselves fully but are also able to relax. Like a flower, they have beautiful qualities that draw us closer to them, and we feel better by taking a moment to notice them. And starfish may not be beautiful, but they have the amazing ability to regenerate any of their five limbs that may be cut off! Of course we can't do that, but we can still learn from the starfish's message: when any of the five areas in our lives is damaged (spiritual, emotional, physical, family or social), the other areas can help heal and restore us. But remember - Jesus calls us to be whole *in His Body*, not however we want. And finding a sand dollar is traditionally a sign of good luck, but do we really want to wait on random luck for help? Few of us would entrust our hard-earned money to buy lottery tickets in the hope that we might one day be able to feed us or our family. The Body of Christ needs to grow for *sure* and be joyful *now*! Yet 'luck' is exactly where many seem to rest. They seem to say, "If God really loves me, things will just come together one day." Well, God does love His people, and He does call us to rest in Him. But in the same breath He calls us to *work* at our growth and joy. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Now consider the idea of the stickman. Throughout this book, we will use that image to explore many of the Biblical concepts of our body and soul in relationships. If at any time it seems too fast, complex or abstract, you can skip ahead to some of the down-to-earth devotionals in the middle or practical exercises in the back. *But I encourage you to come back to this section eventually.* When the Bible is puzzling, we must do the work of putting it together using clear ‘corner pieces’, fitting the rest without forcing or leaving others out. Seeing the how the pieces fit together will help clarify God’s will in your life, and working in groups can help us teach and encourage each other as we go. But take it at a helpful pace.

I placed spiritual fitness at the top of the stickman because it’s the ‘head’ of resilience, both as the *source* of our decisions and as the most *important* of the five areas. CSF rightly defines spiritual concerns as personal *values* (whatever we treasure as ‘good’, whether it is really Good or not) and our personal *beliefs* (what we think is ‘true’, again, whether it is really True or not). The following exercise may help clarify.

Read the brief story below. But before you turn the page, close your eyes and imagine yourself in the scene with them.

There’s a farmhouse way out in the countryside, and a dark thunderstorm is in the background. Children are running in the front yard, and one adult is at the barn with their back turned. The leaves on the trees are blowing, and it’s raining. A car is coming down their long dirt road, and one of the younger children runs toward the car. The other children turn to look.

I’m guessing that you felt some emotions over that, yes?

‘true’ and ‘good’ vs. True and Good

What parts seemed to grab your attention? Was it a scene of reunion? Danger? Something else? Who was good, bad, ignorant or detached in the story? How was the person in the car involved? Where was God? Did anything seem odd or missing? These are questions of *focus* on things that we *value*.

Yes, each of us values many things, but we can’t focus on all of them equally - especially under stress. We tend to focus on a few that seem most important in our *relational context* in the moment: maybe unconditional love, honesty, safety, meaning, responsibility, roles, etc. Our focus in our relational context also leads us to perceive certain ‘truths’: “I must do it”; “God will do it”; “kids are good”; “kids are brats”, etc.

Our sinful nature tends to focus on things of this world that might be ‘good’ (pleasing or beneficial) for *us*. Then these things feel ‘true’ because they are relevant to *our* goal(s). But self-focus only leads to more and more problems. (Genesis 6:5, Exodus 32:1-20ff, Deuteronomy 8, 2 Kings 13:14ff, Psalm 14, Ecclesiastes, Matthew 6:25-33, John 3:1-6, Galatians 5:19-24, etc.)

**‘good’ and ‘true’
are about us.
‘Good’ and ‘True’
are about God.**

Yes, by seeking our ‘good’ we can avoid threats to us, attack injustices against us, grieve our losses, and embrace benefits. But we begin feeling overwhelmed by trying to focus on *everything* to keep safe; we overlook loved ones because we don’t have time for them; we attack others for not making our world better; and we eventually pig out on what makes us feel better, numb out, or blow up when we perceive that *there is nothing* that is ‘good’ and ‘true’ for us. Sound familiar? Our sinful nature is not ‘rational’, it simply *wants*.

Look at the stickman again. I drew the image to show an ‘openness’ at all five points to remind us of two vital truths:

1) whatever’s around us *can* come *into* us, and 2) whatever is in us *will* come *out* of us, especially when we are weak and squeezed.

***Whatever is around
us can come into us,
and whatever is in us
will come out of us.***

This world is full of God’s glory but it is also stained with sin, so we must be intentional to fill our lives with Christ to overflow His Truth and Goodness. Otherwise, we’ll be like a scuba man swimming in a sewer with a cotton diving suit! (Colossians 2:6-9) Too gross? Then think of it this way. At the beach, we can soak up the amazing sights of God’s blue seas, warm sands, and maybe even cool dolphins for great family time. But if we stay long enough we will not only soak up enough sun to blister our physical hides, we may soak in other sights that will blister our souls: drunken vacationers cursing and fighting, women (and men) barely clothed, kids disrespecting their parents, parents ignoring or being cruel to their children, and worse. I think you get the ugly picture.

God designed us to receive His Truth and Goodness so we will overflow with the same. And if He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4), then He *will* flow through us into our world! Just to be clear, by His Goodness I mean what *Jesus* values even if everyone else disagrees: His presence, wisdom, purity, justice, faithfulness, and honesty - even when we do not benefit from it or perceive it. By His Truth I mean that everything Jesus commands and promises - even if everyone else disagrees. So, we need to *know* God.

You may say, “But God calls us to live by *faith*! Graphics and definitions can’t fully explain the Lord!” Good for you!

It's true that no sinner can fully understand God. But He does *want* us to know His heart and basic plan in Christ. (Genesis 18:17ff, Jeremiah 31:31-34, John 15:15, etc.) He calls us to *faith* in Him because, although believers have His spirit, our sinful flesh wars against us. (Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:16-17; Ephesians 4:17-32, esp v. 22; 2 Timothy 3:1-7, esp v. 4) In other words, we can't trust ourselves!

We must trust in *God's* Truth and Goodness revealed in *Jesus*, and these are the two basics: to trust and obey God's Son. It is no wonder that Scripture calls us to fill our minds with His Word about Christ. (Leviticus 23 [God's command to teach Israel everlasting ordinances that pre-figured aspects of salvation that Jesus would bring], Joshua 1:6-8, Psalm 119:9-16, Romans 12:1-3, Philipians 4:5-9, Colossians 3:1-4, etc.)

Our circumstances may *feel* 'true' (important to our goals), but they're only temporary and must be compared to God's Word. Godly leaders, servants, scholars, and even W.A.I.T. training must never be our primary inspirations and guides. So why work on mindfulness if emotions can't point us to *solutions*? Because learning to hear our body can help us discern *spiritual* problems with our values and beliefs. And we can exercise in small groups to build up His Body in several practical areas of balance, flexibility, stamina, etc.

Now take a minute to reflect back on the story on page 11, but this time focus on some of the things that *Jesus* values. How does this new focus change your feelings, interpretation and actions? Don't be surprised if many are not sure of how to respond. Most of us have spent more time reacting to our flesh rather than responding to our Lord. And if you want to talk about that, confess only *your* foolishness not others' sins.

Now, where do we *stand*?

Look at the stickman again. The spirit is the ‘head’ of resilience, but family and social circles are the ‘feet’ where we stand. We noted that ‘family’ is about loyalties by birth or by choice: biological family, God the Father, mother-figures, ‘blood brothers’ and others who depend on each other. Here, we give or expect high levels of commitment. Social circles don’t have the same requirements, restrictions, rights, rewards, etc. We consider them ‘opportunities’ to adopt, drop, or hop around in as we like. I’m not saying that we *should*, but often we *do*. Some even consider God an acquaintance. And when we don’t get what we value from ‘family’, we often shift the weight to our friends. But that’s like standing on one foot: we can’t do it for long. Let’s take a few minutes for an exercise.

Many of you may not know everyone in your group very well. Some members may be bold and transparent quickly, but it can be okay to take your time before deciding to trust others. Therefore, you might want to discuss the following in your group or just record your thoughts in your journal. But understand that honesty often reveals uncomfortable truths.

“If relational circles are the feet where my spirit stands . . .”

- the way I see it, the family who *raised* me was like a . . .
 - warm fuzzy slipper
 - running shoe with a rock in it
 - snug dress shoe
 - totally different style
- to me, some of the people I *depend on now* are like a . . .
 - flip-flop
 - perfect fit
 - sports cleat
 - steel-toed boot
- the friends I *want* to hang out with more would be like a . . .
 - bare foot
 - hip-wader
 - high class boot
 - work shoe

See? Our perception of relationships effects our emotions and can make it *easier* or *harder* for us to see what is really True and Good. But you're probably more interested in what *God* says is True and what *He* wants. Awesome!

The fact is that the Lord designed us for relationship with *Him* (Genesis 1:27, Psalm 100:3, Isaiah 43:7, 1 Corinthians 6:13, 1 Peter 2:9ff, etc.) and with *each other*. (Genesis 2:18-25, Exodus 20, 1 Corinthians 11:9, Ephesians 2:10ff), not in family *or* in social circles. God calls us to honor Him in *both*. For instance, we are to leave biological family and cleave to new family (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Ephesians 5:31, etc.), to care for and enjoy His spiritual family (1 Corinthians 1:11ff, John 1:12, Galatians 5:13ff, 1 John 3:1-10, etc.), and to begin social relationships with the prayerful goal that they may *become* His family (Matthew 28:18-20, Philemon 1:15-17, 1 John 3:1-10, etc.). But He even calls us to honor Him in social relationships with non-believers who clearly have *no* interest in Him. (Matthew 5:1ff, 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, 2 Corinthians 6:14ff, Ephesians 6:6-9, 1 Peter 2:12-18, etc.)

If you haven't already, read and discuss some of the above passages as a group. Then go back to the exercise on page 15 to talk specifics about what *God* says is True and Good and how those can influence your emotions and relational actions.

The reality is that each of us stands among 'family' *and* social circles. And, if you are a Christian, you also stand in the spiritual reality of your re-born nature and in your sinful nature. That can really confuse our emotions and choice of actions, huh? But those are also great reasons for us to W.A.I.T. in Jesus to be confident in *His* Truth and Goodness for *His Body*. We need to put our faith in what *He* says.

What the Bible reveals about feelings and actions

Again, God designed us to walk in relationships. And He connects our spirit to our relationships through our body in two ways. Look at the stickman's 'hands'. On the one hand, our body *experiences* (feels) our spirit's focus in emotions: bad, mad, sad, and glad (see Genesis 1-4¹). On the other hand, our body also *expresses* (acts) our spirit's focus by avoiding, attacking, pausing and pursuing. Our emotions are not good or evil, but our spirit's focus and our actions can be. And because everything belongs to God, we must honor Him inside and out. (Ecclesiastes 12:14, Romans 11:36 and 14:23, Colossians 3:16-17, Revelation 4:11, etc.)

***God connects our
spirit to our
relationships
through our body
in two ways.***

It also seems that God designed our body and soul to be *cumulatively intense* in relationships - in other words, to begin in fear (godly or ungodly) and build toward an extreme form

¹ Like Adam and Eve, when we feel 'bad' (fear or guilt), we try to hide behind our works and blame others when discovered. (Genesis 3:7-13) If we continue in self-focus, we grow 'mad' demanding props for our work or 'sad' and drop our face (distancing in relationships). Cain seems to have waffled between both (Genesis 4:1-9), but his sadness, like Esau's, didn't lead to repentance. (Hebrews 12:15-17) Finally, we can become 'glad' in our sin - believing we're entitled to crush anyone in our way. (Genesis 4:19-24) Of course the same four emotions can come from a godly heart for service to God. Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:9). In fact, the most common Hebrew word for fear (*yirah*) also means awe, reverence, respect and devotion. Regarding anger, Moses and Paul instructed others to confront fellow believers who had wronged them for the peace and purity of God's people. (Leviticus 19:17-18 and Ephesians 4:26ff) Regarding sorrow, King Solomon and Paul encouraged others to weep. (Ecclesiastes 7:3 and Romans 12:15) See? Our spiritual focus generates emotional 'fuel' for relational action.

of joy (again, godly or ungodly). Since Genesis serves as an introduction to the book on Life, it shouldn't surprise us that the opening chapters reveal examples of the opposing paths.²

As I said, one of the results of sin is that when we don't get what we want in our 'family' or friends - we just shift to the other. Even worse, when we don't get what we want from *either* one, our self-focused spirit tells our body simply to satisfy our physical feelings - to self-soothe by indulging in food, sex, rest, alcohol, achievements, etc. to feel a little more (or less) _____. And we reward our selves similarly. Or we might attack our image, feeling that we deserve a better body; neglect self-care, feeling that we have no value; or even shut down, despairing of life itself. These are literal pulls of the flesh Paul described in Romans 8:4-13 & Galatians 6:16-17.

When we don't get what we want from family or friends, we're often tempted to merely satisfy our feelings.

Remember the stickman's hands? Living to satisfy our emotions is like resting 'single-handedly' (pun intended) in physical gratification: the Lord didn't design us to live that

² Compare the lines of Cain and Abel. Note that Cain's line offered the works of their hands (Genesis 4:1-5 & 20-22). Cain's face was cast down on the earth, literally and figuratively (Genesis 4:6), and the heart of his lineage culminated in the 7th generation with Lamech's murderous entitlement (Genesis 4:23-24). But Abel trusted in the life of another to justify him before God (Genesis 4:1-5), and the line of Seth (who replaced Abel) called on God's name (Genesis 4:26). The heart of Seth's lineage culminated in their 7th generation with Enoch - a man who walked with God and did not die but was taken directly to heaven (Genesis 5:24). What's the point? The *result* of our emotions reflects their *root*: a heart focused on self or on Christ. And the intent of our heart is the first step toward our destination: with God or without Him.

way either. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Philippians 4:17-24, etc.) He designed and calls us to live as *whole* people in His Body.

The Army often calls for its communities to be ‘resilient’: willing and able to bounce back from hardship. But we must start as *whole individuals*: our spirit telling us *why* to bounce back (due to what we value and believe); our relational circles telling us *where* to bounce back (into families and friends who have similar treasures and truths to share); and our bodily experience and expression telling us *how* to bounce back (through emotions cueing us to follow through with actions).

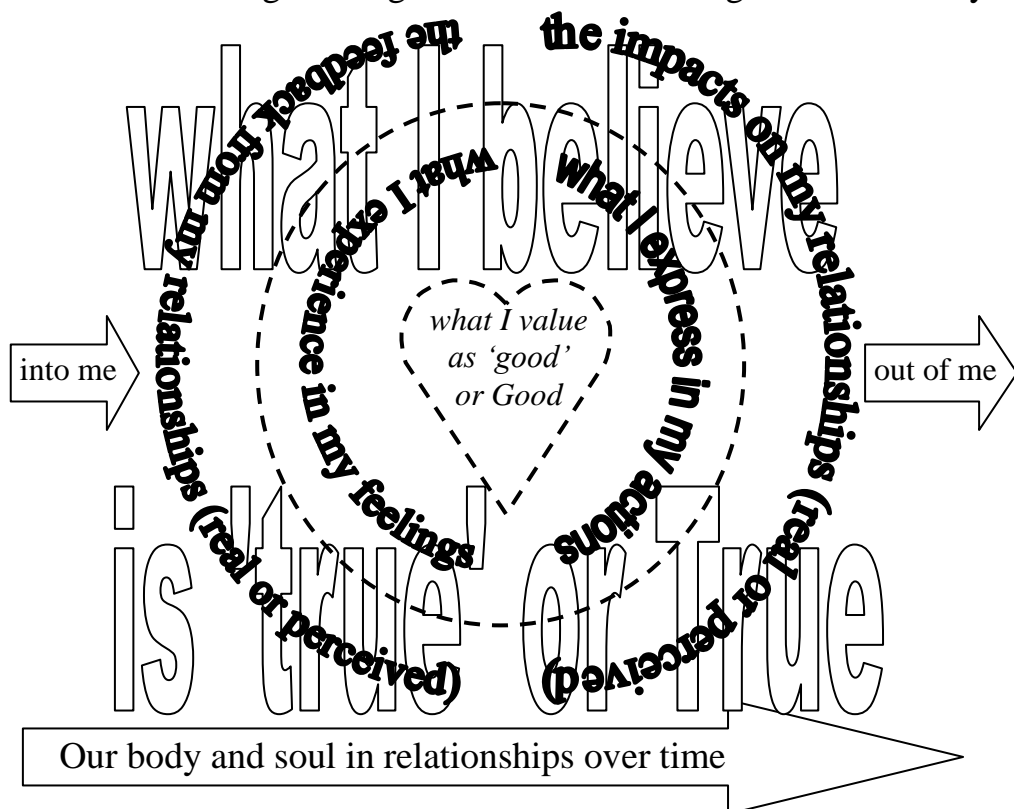
We live ‘head’ to ‘toe’ *from* our spirit *through* our body *in* relationships and vice-versa. But genuine, whole and lasting resilience only comes by life in Christ and His Body. Only His love and power can open our hearts to His Word and Spirit to see and embrace what is *really* True and Good. Without Jesus, we actually work hard *not* to be open or change. What?

Take a few deep breaths and let this sink in, because it is essential that we grasp this truth. For, none of us seeks a doctor unless we accept the seriousness of our condition.

Scripture is clear. Sin has wounded and isolated each of us. Without Jesus’ intervention in our lives, even born-again believers do not always listen to each other - much less learn from each other or help each other. Notice how many of the epistles in the New Testament address divisions in His Body and how often! Only Jesus is Life, but His people have two natures: our new spirit *and* fallen flesh.

***Without Jesus’
intervention in our
lives, even believers
do not always listen
to each other -
much less help
each other.***

The perforated circle below represents our ‘open’ bodies (see the top of page 13). Use this image to discuss some of the issues of being born-again in Christ but living in a fallen body.



In a moment, we will begin explore specific dynamics within us and between us that hinder our relationships and specific ways to reverse downward spirals. But first, update your group (or write in your journal) on how your thoughts, feelings and actions may be changing. For example, what do you see in God’s Word that inspires and guides, versus what you see in the world? What are you really valuing? To whom are you committing? How are you responding? And listen to each other. The next five sections suggest specific ways to hear each others’ hearts for our mutual growth in His Body.

Live a *whole* life in Christ

Again, God created us to live as *whole* people. Even in our fallen flesh, we can and must experience a full range of legitimate emotions. We also can and must express a full range of legitimate relational actions. But both must be guided by what Jesus says is True and Good in His Word.

In fact, our emotions, actions and beliefs reflect much of what it means to be created in Jesus' image as Priest, King and Prophet, respectively. I describe these truths and applications in greater detail in the companion book, "*W.A.I.T. training, the Bible study edition*". But for now, may it suffice to say that God designed us to feel *and* to act *and* to think because that is what *He* does. Yet, most of us and even whole denominations and organizations in Christ's name tend to favor one of these over the others. Most individuals and most churches are very emotional or intellectual or action-oriented' but not many seem to be whole. The Lord calls us to live fully in His image.

We must feel appropriately bad over sins and real dangers. If we ignore or suppress these feelings, how will we repent or keep safe from evil influences? We must feel rightly mad over injustices to God's commands. How else will His Body step out to help the helpless and defend the defenseless for His glory as a beacon of hope to this world? We must feel rightly sad over losses of what God values. Godly sorrow may be one of the most powerful experiences of love – especially because we live in a dying world. And we must feel rightly glad over all that Jesus values. If we only live part of His image, we will merely be bleeding hearts, talking heads, or forceful rulers. Jesus wants more from His Body, so we need more from Him and from each other. And, again, we must base all of our emotions, actions and beliefs in His Truth and Goodness.

Stop trying to avoid all emotional pain

It can hinder self-awareness (ours and theirs) to convey to a hurting person “Please don’t cry” or “Don’t be mad at me!” or “That’s not true” or “I don’t have all day” because emotions act as physical layers around the soul. Most of us have so many layers we don’t even realize what’s within until we meet with someone who’s willing to go to those dark places with us.

While it may be true that we can’t listen to “all that” (especially if they are important to us), our *inability* to hear others’ pain is likely our *unwillingness* to experience our own pain in the journey together. But if our hearts can be open and our bodies can wait (demonstrating that “I’m not judging or running”), they may feel free to begin peeling some of their layers so we can see more of the real issue: their treasure. Even if they sob or scream about *your* relationship with them, think of it this way: they are *honoring* you by *choosing* to share their pain with you. That’s usually not something one does with strangers or enemies! And generally, the more upset they are with you, the more important you are to them.

But what if you feel like you’re sitting with an iceberg – a cold or hidden heart? Here’s a tip: watch their eyes, lips and fingers. The tiniest muscles respond quickly to the soul. Do you see even a small struggle there? If so, they’re trying to keep it inside – often because they’ve had few relationships that they perceived as genuinely loving. So go slow. And don’t play Sherlock Holmes or Sigmund Freud with their soul. That could be terrifying or infuriating to someone who has been neglected, abuse, or even just misunderstood. They need time to feel safe enough to peel those layers at *their* speed. But you should be a light of genuine openness and committed presence. A ‘light of openness and presence’? What is that?

Remember day one of creation in Genesis 1:1ff? The world was just like our hurting friends (and us): ‘formless, empty and dark’. A wreck. So God said, “Forget this! I’m outta here!” No? How about , “In the beginning, the world was so awesome that God decided to shine on it!” No? No.

Neither is the good news. On the very first day, God sent Light to the wreck – and not by the sun, moon or stars. That was on day four. So? Scripture seems clear: that supernatural Light was Jesus in His pre-bodily form. We’ll get to the significance of this point in a moment. But first, why do I think this? 1) When Scripture speaks of supernatural light, it is *always* a physical manifestation of God coming to His undeserving people. Look it up! 2) The prophets described the Messiah as the coming “Light”. 3) John’s gospel says Jesus was in the beginning of creation and that His life was the light of men. 4) Jesus referred to Himself as the Light several times in the gospels. 5) Revelation 21:23 and 22:5 tells us that the new earth will not need the sun or moon for the Glory of God, the Lamb, will give it light. Why does this matter?

Jesus is graciously present to the undeserving –shining on us and warming us. So when we rest in His grace, we can bear the very worst judgments against us (true and false) and still be at peace with that person because we know that we are *already* forever loved in *Christ*. But if we focus on the *person’s* opinion of us (true or not) we will feel the need to protect ourselves or *become* someone lovable in *their* sight. Rest in Christ. In Him, we don’t have to fear any punishment. (1 John 4:8-19)

***When we really rest
in Jesus’ gracious
love for us, we can
hear the very worst
true and false
judgments against
us and still be there
for that person.***

Discern your values as ends and means

In the military, we often speak about the importance of discerning 2nd and 3rd order effects of our actions in combat and even when training. Effects are the ripples that push out from our actions, creating other ripples that create other ripples and on and on. For example, if I speak authoritatively to the locals in a country where our troops are deployed, that will likely have a ripple effect of encouraging a certain attitude among the locals. But will it be a greater respect for us or a greater disdain? The second ripple may be more cooperation in defeating the bad guys among them or more resistance. So the third ripple may be less or more deaths among our troops.

Take the idea of ripples of Effects pushing out and imagine ripples of Affects pulling in. Affects are passions that reflect our values or ‘treasures’. E.g., a man might treasure his cool car (3rd ripple) because he believes it might get him a cool gal (2nd ripple). But he might even love (the idea of) the cool gal because he believes she will bring him a sense of acceptance (1st ripple). Everything we value can be understood as layers of means toward ends. And there are virtually unlimited means: cars, girls, acceptance, etc., but there are only two ends: “me” (that guys’ core value) or the Lord Jesus Christ.

Anyone who does not put Jesus first puts themselves first. Even many who claimed to love Jesus merely wanted to use Him (Matthew 7:21-23) and turned away when His will didn’t fit their wishes (John 6:60-69). But Scripture says that even believers continue to struggle between loving self and loving God (Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:16-17; Ephesians 4:17-32, esp v. 22; 2 Timothy 3:1-7, esp v. 4). Our flesh screams, “Me! Me! Me!”, but the Spirit He’s given says, “Your will be done.” So what should believers do? Again, it’s about His Body.

Engage others with openness for your mutual growth

But be ready – when we are open to hear another’s pain and to speak ours, it may sometimes feel like we’re both shooting flaming arrows from our hearts into each others’. Still, much Good can come from engaging others with our whole being: body and soul in relationships. Each comes to other clinging to or hoping for what we value: reputation, safety, growth, intimacy, to please self or to please Christ. And because of how each views the other person, our souls believes ‘realities’ about being with them: threats, injustices, losses, and benefits. So our bodies feel the related emotions of bad, mad, sad and/or glad. Then our bodies tend to react toward the other person by avoiding, attacking, pausing or pursuing those ‘realities’ for the sake of our ‘treasure(s)’.

But when we are genuinely *open*, we will honestly listen and speak to each other to “*re-spect*” what we’re valuing, who we’re trusting, and how we’re responding (refer back to page 8 on these dynamics). That will mean that we go to Jesus either to *strengthen* or to *change* what we are valuing, who we are trusting, and how we are responding. It’s about His Body.

We must rest in Jesus’ grace to do this. He brought us to life though we were unworthy and unable (Deuteronomy 9:4ff, John 3:3-8, Romans 5:10, Ephesians 2:1-10). When we rest in His *grace*, we will be free to invite others to “Say that again, please. I’m not sure I understand.” and really want to hear their heart without fear or judgment. Even when they verbally attack us, we can genuinely say “This is hard for me to hear, but you’re important to me so I want to hear your heart.”

But even Jesus wasn’t open to all people (Matthew 26:63, Mark 1:32-38, John 2:24). So let’s be clear about the goal.

Hunger and thirst for Righeousness

Most importantly, we must seek to grow in faith and following the Lord *as He really is*. When we're really open, we will seek to rest in and commit to *Him* not simply to our family sayings, religious creeds and traditions, cultural expectations, or even to personal goals or fears. Exodus 32 is an example of what happens when we 'create God in our image' so that He might approve our desires. After all, what type of life would a young bull approve? A "take whatever makes you happy" life! But open hearts want to know God as He really is - no matter the cost.

Then we will listen to others and pray, "Feed me, Lord, through this person because I want to know YOU! *Use* them to increase my hunger and thirst for Your Truth and Goodness in Your Word, not just for my own interpretation or for whatever numbs my pain or increases my pleasure!" To even the foulest unbeliever, we will *genuinely* listen so we will seek satisfaction in *Christ*. We will hear their wickedness and examine *our* hearts for repentance. We will hear their hurts and talk with them looking to *Him*.

The Power of ‘Proximity’ and ‘Progress’

The Lord designed us for *holy* relationships in the True and Good God, *Jesus*: pure (unpolluted) intimacy with Him and in His Body. Pardon the alliteration in the title, but I chose the phrase to help us remember two fundamental truths – the first is the holy ‘*proximity*’ (closeness) for which God created us where we find His Goodness and Truth. The second is that all of us constantly struggle in our *progress* for intimacy. Even the best of believers are daily stalled by their sins and others’. Note the picture of our struggle of progress for proximity in four basic *thoughts* (beliefs & values), feelings and **behaviors**:

- When your spirit *focuses on a significant threat*, your body experiences fear cueing you to express this by **avoiding** the threat (so you tend to hide, retreat, bargain, destroy, etc.).
- When your spirit *focuses on a significant injustice*, you experience anger cueing you to express this by **confronting** the injustice (so you tend to attack, punish, withhold, etc.).
- When your spirit *focuses on a significant loss*, you experience sadness cueing you to express this by **pausing** for the loss (so you tend to remember, vent, numb out, etc.).
- When your spirit *focuses on a significant benefit*, you experience joy cueing you to express this by **pursuing** the benefit (so you tend to celebrate, embrace, relax, etc.).

And *where* does all this happen? In relationships. But when we seek closeness as the *world* defines it (“my happiness here & now” no strings attached) then our spiritual focus, bodily expression and relational circles *hinder* real progress. So we scream “Why avoid threats, facing injustices, and grieve losses?! If this world is all there is, let’s eat and drink for tomorrow we die!!” (see 1 Corinthians 15:32 in context)

Even pursuing ‘good’ things can hinder growth – if we define ‘good’ as whatever gives us pleasure or numbs our pain. We can ‘love’ our kids so much that we hold onto them and slow their maturity. We can value money or a sense of productivity so much that we devote more of ourselves to strangers than our families. We can cling so tightly to comfort that we doing any kind of work. We can even ‘love’ the gym so much that we refuse to give it up even when our loved ones beg us for more time. We can ‘love’ ourselves to death!

But the ‘goods’ of this world are *not* all our only option. There are ‘Goods’ *much* more valuable. That is why Jesus told Mary not to hold onto Him after He had risen from the dead (John 20:17a). She valued His physical presence with her, but He knew that it was better to ascend to the Father and reign over the whole *world*. (John 20:17bff) And aren’t we glad that Jesus did not ‘embrace’ (hold onto) His position in heaven but gave it up to come for us? (Philippians 2:4-11)

Think about it. Each of the four cycles of spiritual focus, emotion, and behavior are based in what we value as ‘good’ or Good - what we consider our treasures (Matthew 6:21). Fear tries to avoid whatever might threaten our treasures; anger seeks to confront whatever has already violated our treasures; sadness cries out to pause no matter whatever else is going on because our treasures have been lost or may be lost; but joy feels like we’ve arrived, so why go on to anything else?

So how *should* we respond to our fears, angers, sadnesses and joys? What’s from God and what’s our flesh? W.A.I.T. training is designed to exercise interdependence of Christ’s Body in the Truth and Goodness of His Word under physical and relational stresses. If you don’t remember anything else,

remember this: the Lord designed intimacy in His Body to come not just at the end of our destination but *in each moment of our journey* – in threats, fear and avoiding; in injustice, anger and confrontation; in loss, sadness and pausing; and in blessing, joy and embracing. When we look at our world through His Word and walk in His Body by His Spirit, we grow closer to Him and to each other!

The Lord designed intimacy in His Body to come not just at the end of our destination but in each moment of our journey.

I started this book by referring to people in counseling. But all of us have the same basic struggle: *when we can't manage our perceptions and emotions, we're not sure how to make key decisions, especially decisions about relationships*. So let's stop trying to 'manage' our stress and start listening to it.

God created us to make key relational decisions: "Go forth and rule the world" (Genesis 1:28); "make disciples in My image" (Matthew 28:19); "bear much fruit, proving yourselves to be My disciples" (John 15:8), etc. So we can't go about them trivially on a blind auto-pilot. But, again, sin weighs us down with conflicting beliefs and intense feelings.

So what are we to do? First we must discern what we believe and feel, here and now. Many feelings flow from a false, exaggerated or sinful belief but we can't change what we will not accept as our reality. For example, I cannot address my anger if I will not accept that I currently believe "I deserve better." And lasting change must involve our relationships.

Again, it can help to write or share your thoughts, feelings, questions, etc. W.A.I.T. training should be interactive.

Two reasons that individuals tend to resist change

When we can't self-*gratify*, the first reaction of our flesh to any kind of hardship is to self-*protect*. Even when we accept some level of pain, it is usually only after we've chosen what we believe will most benefit us in the long run. We may not open up to others *at all* if we believe that doing so may reveal our weaknesses; we may deny true accusations against us if we believe that the truth could crush a key relationship; we may even overpower others emotionally so they won't have an influence on us, but doesn't that reveal that they already do? Self-defense may protect us from looking at ugly truths about ourselves, but we will never move away from ugly truths until we can accept them as realities to be addressed within us.

Even when we are open to our need for change, our second *natural* reaction is to try harder at our 'modus operandi': our preferred method of action. But more physical *doing* does not change in our spiritual *being*. For instance, if I feel that I am not loved enough, I may just lean on my strengths or run from my weaknesses even more. I might spend more time 'succeeding' at the office, play guitar more to prove to myself that I can do good things, avoid those who tend to overlook or criticize me even more, or self-soothe with food or sleep more. Yes, these may bring outward expertise or less pain, but 'exercising' self-improvement only reinforces the basic problem of self-focus. Change requires dying to self (Luke 9:23-25) and seeing the goodness of it. Only Jesus can do such a great and wonderful work in us.

***More physical
doing does not
change our
spiritual being.***

Again, write a few basics on what you think and feel about these things. Re-reading your comments later can help you 'step outside yourself' for more clarity on your current spirit.

Two reasons that our relationships tend to resist change

First, most of us get caught in self-perpetuating relational patterns. For example, a husband tries to get more personal space ‘because’ his wife always chases after him. So his wife chases him more, and he has to work even harder to get more space. Or is it the other way around? It really doesn’t matter, because it’s the same thing. One employee is a workaholic ‘because’ their co-worker does the bare minimum, and the co-worker does the bare minimum ‘because’ they know the workaholic will do the rest. A parent is always frustrated with their child for not doing their chores ‘because’ the child spends so much time playing with other children, and the child spends so much time playing with other children ‘because’ the parent is always so frustrated with the child. Neighbor ‘A’ keeps to herself ‘because’ neighbors ‘B’ and ‘C’ do not show a consistent interest in a friendship with neighbor ‘A’, and neighbors ‘B’ and ‘C’ do not show a consistent interest to build a friendship ‘because’ neighbor ‘A’ keeps to herself.

The second *natural* reason our relationships resist change is that each of us perceives the relational cycle working for us. The husband who works extra hard to get more person space gets it – for the moment. The wife who wants to have more time with her husband gets it – for the moment. Each person just has to work harder and harder to get more and more of their heart’s desire. Cycle repeat because they seem to work!

But that’s not really the solution either, is it? Look back to review the futility and foolishness of pleasing our flesh. Real change within us and between us can only come in seeking a different goal by a different source: not protection of self by self, but living for Christ in the Body of Christ. So what now?

What does God want me to do at my job? In my marriage? With my money? These are important questions, but I must first understand *why* I do what I'm doing *now*. When we discern our current values and beliefs, those discoveries will clarify the source and intensity of our feelings. War must be waged in Truth - often against *our* 'treasures' and 'truth'.

Why do I feel exposed, angry, depressed or happy? Just believing something or feeling it doesn't make it Good or True. Past experiences can shape us with a pre-disposition toward guilt or anger or sadness or even self-centered joy if those experiences were strong, repeated, or occurred in key relationships. And if we don't discern our current beliefs, we will keep flying on an auto-pilot programmed by past traumas and personal desires which may not be the same as God's.

But even after I begin focusing on *True* threats, injustices, losses and blessings, what should be my *Good response*? If you answered "only God can say!" you're absolutely right. A 'good' response might just avoid pain or maximize pleasure, but a *Good* response will honor Jesus and build up His Body.

The next step, after we begin to notice our current beliefs and feelings in action and accept them as realities is to turn our focus to what is True and Good in God's Word with the help of His people. It's the only way to become free of self-focus and really hear and accept others' hearts. Otherwise, we'll just keep protecting and indulging ourselves to death - literally.

Our decisions, beliefs, and feelings often weigh us down because they involve our key relationships, but we can't truly hear another person's heart if we believe they may increase our pain. Many of you already know that God says to trust in

Him *and* to die to self (Matthew 16:24, John 6:63, Romans 8:5-13, 1 Corinthians 5:5, Galatians 5:16, Philippians 3:3, etc). But do we recognize those spiritual battles within our bodies?

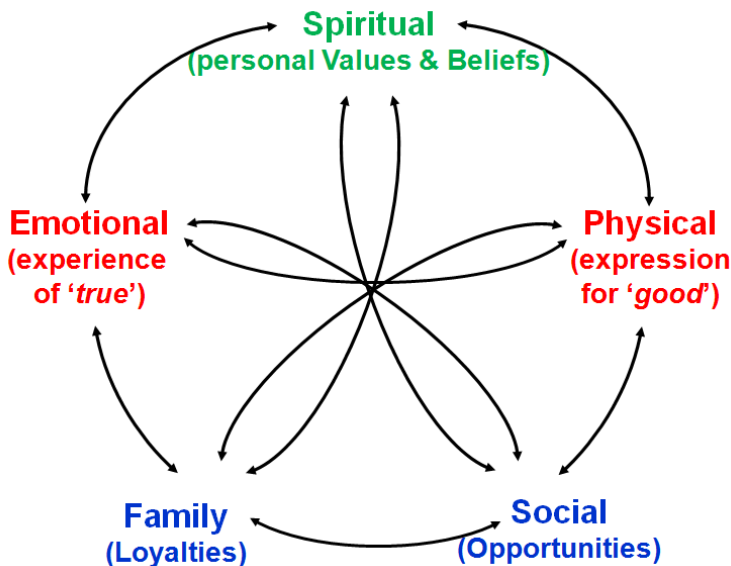
When (out of fear *or* pride) I value my reputation and believe that my wife will reject me if I fail her, I cannot hear her concern that I've not washed the dishes as promised. I will tune her out or come up with a dozen reasons why I didn't fail, deflect the issue by making her disappointment as a bigger deal than my 'forgetfulness', etc. I may even give a peace offering by apologizing and cleaning the entire kitchen to make myself look better. But the truth is that I will not have really heard my wife's heart or examined my own. And when I do not grasp the *real* issues, I will likely repeat the problem. For, again, I will not address what I will not accept as a reality. We must direct our hurts and confusions to God's Word and find our hope in Christ. W.A.I.T. training can help small groups Watch their bodies under stress to Acept their current spiritual reality so they can Ivest in what is Good and True in God's Word and Team in the Body of Christ. Why exercise?

- *Our body connects our spirit to our relationships, so enough physical stress in close relationships will reveal our spirits.*
- *As we grow in understanding of self and trust in each other, we can use the physical and relational stress to do something supernatural: to experience genuine vulnerability of body and soul so we can express interdependence as His Body.*

Why push to know our true spirit and share our heart with others? We won't address what we don't know, and others can't help us with what we won't share. If you're hesitant to be transparent, take heart. Seeing and sharing the actual state of our souls be a lynchpin of real change and joy. (Luke 7:47)

Lynchpins of resistance or change

Our body connects our soul to relationships, and all three are ‘lynchpins’: points of connection that hold the others in place. But if one pin can no longer hold, everything crumbles. Lynchpins can be tangible like the keystone at the top of a Roman archway or intangible like investors’ perception of the stock market. Our soul’s values and beliefs are intangible but related to our tangible actions and presence in relationships to connect our spiritual and physical world: a family home and family name, physical habits and a sense of control, etc. Real change comes when our strongholds fail and the pieces of our lives are re-built by a new spiritual focus, new actions and new relationships according to what *Jesus* says is Good and True.



Think of the connecting arrows above as rubber bands: under stress, every part of us is stretched. Yet we tend to snap back to believing, feeling and doing the same things because our treasures, relationships and actions have been *pounded in* (i.e., “I must . . .!”) or *pampered* (“I just can’t . . .!”). Really?

It's not good or bad to feel emotions in our bodies. In Genesis 6:6-7, the Hebrew term even describes God's grieving as נָחַם (*nāḥam*), an onomatopoetic term (from its sound) for *physically difficult breathing*. But many of our emotions flow from our selfish desires for 'treasures' just to please our flesh (see Romans 1:21-32, Galatians 5:16-17, Colossians 3:5, 2 Timothy 3:4, etc.). It can be difficult even to discern much less overcome such slaveries that seem to help us feel better.

So how are we to cope with intangible forces that tie our emotions to false beliefs and selfish relationships as they are? Scripture's answer is "repentance". If that sounds cliché and empty of hope, let's take a closer look at what that means.

It's significant that God inspired the Old Testament to be written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. Hebrew tends to emphasize holistic, inter-related ideas, and Greek tends to emphasize specific nuances. But we need both views to better understand the whole and the parts of God's glorious and complex creation.

The Hebrew terms for repentance, שׁוּב and נָחַם, convey the ideas of "returning" (an action) and "sadness" (an emotion). But the Greek word, μετανοέω, means to have "another mind" (beliefs and values). So which ones are correct and important? All three, of course! Biblical "repentance" involves our whole being: body and soul in relationships. For that reason, we must re-'spect' (re-look) the intangibles that *we* consider 'true' and 'good' and start respecting what the intangible commands and promises that *God* says are True and Good. When we trust and follow Him, our fears, angers, sadness, and joys will keep us coming back to Him for holy intimacy in His Body.

But tangible lynchpins are also powerful. Let's not fall into the false notion that *spiritual* things are really important to God and powerful but *physical* things are not really important and are not powerful. Not true! Yes, everything on this earth will be rust and dust one day, but God designed us to be in relationship with others, *body* and soul, and to be stewards over this *world*. Consider some of the physical lynchpins in Scripture that can chain us from walking with Christ:

- In Genesis, 44:22, Joseph's brothers believed that Benjamin could not leave their father Jacob or he (Jacob) would die.
 - In Jeremiah 2:12-24, God describes Israel's lusts as a wild donkey in heat and calls them to break their bonds.
 - In Matthew 5:24, Jesus calls for physical actions to break the chains of guilt between brothers.
 - Matthew 10:37 warns us of loving family over Jesus.
 - In Deuteronomy 8, Moses warns us of the pull of comforts.
 - In Acts 13:39, Paul says that our faith in Christ frees us from what physical obedience to the law could not provide.
 - In John 8:32-34, Jesus says the Truth will set you free from slavery to sin. And the context refers to fleshly slaveries.
 - In 1 Corinthians 6:12ff, we see that food and sex are powers.
 - In Galatians 4:8-10, Paul names mechanical religious rituals as physical actions that can be slaveries.
 - In 2 Peter 2:12, similar physical slaveries are described as animal instincts of passion.
 - In Matthew 10:38ff, Jesus warns against self-preservation in this world and self-indulgence in this world
 - Matthew 19:21 & 1 Timothy 6:10 caution loving money.
- Things and relationships are powerful 'lynchpins' because God designed us body and soul, so the physical world is where we express our spirit. But we must W.A.I.T. for *His* treasure.

See and say it. Then share and show it.

Scripture seems to reveal a four-step process to deal with whatever is holding us in sinful patterns. First, He calls us to see our *problem* (valuing this world and pleasing self which chains us to insecurity, meaninglessness, and hopelessness) and to see the *solution* of trusting Jesus and walking in His Body for pure intimacy and the security, purpose and joy that flow from Him (Exodus 33:13 & 18, Judges 6:17, 1 Samuel 20:14, Psalm 19:8 and 119:18, Proverbs 20:13, Isaiah 9:2, Daniel 2:6 & 9, Matthew 4:16 & 6:22, John 9:10ff, Acts 9:18, Ephesians 1:18). But God calls us to more than our personal awareness. He calls us to say our sin (Genesis 3:9, Leviticus 16:21& 26:40, Numbers 5:6-7, Psalm 32:5, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9, etc.) and to say our new Treasure: Jesus Christ and all of His ways. (Esther 4:14, Habakkuk 1:13, Matthew 10:33, Luke 19:40, John 9:22 & 12:42, Acts 24:14, Romans 10:9 & 14:11, Philippians 2:11, 1 John 4:3, 2 John 1:7, Revelation 3:5, etc.)

Then we are to leave our former alliances and share our lives with His people (Genesis 12:1, Numbers 14:2ff & 25:3, Ruth 1:16, Proverbs 9:9, Jeremiah 49:11, Matthew 19:27, Mark 6:11, Luke 9:62, Romans 12:4-10, 1 Corinthians 12, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Galatians 6:1-10, 1 John 2:19, etc.). And lastly, we must show our love for Christ (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 41:6, Hosea 10:4, Isaiah 37:31 & 45:8, Ezekiel 17:8 & 13, Matthew 3:8 & 6:7, Mark 4:20, 11:13, Luke 8:15, John 15:1ff, Rom 7:4ff, Galatians 5:22, Eph 5:6, James 2:14ff, etc.)

Did you hear the progress of greater proximity (closeness) specifically in the Body of Christ? As we see our sin and His goodness, say these to each other, share our lives and show our faith in Him, we grow in secure, purposeful and joyful dependence on Him and interdependence with each other.

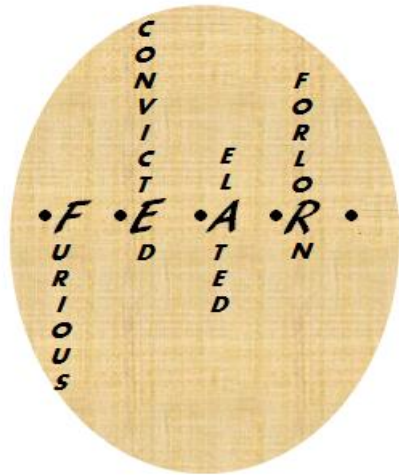
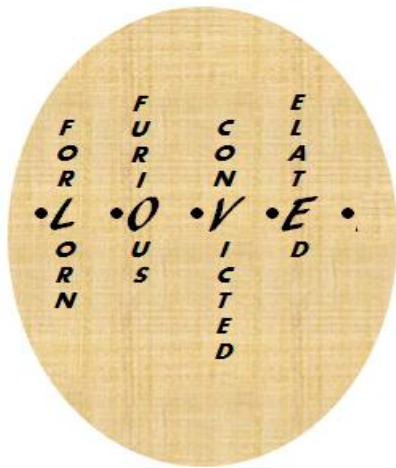
Felt Emotions and Heart Dispositions

Which do you think is harder, exposing your real heart or having it exposed? It really depends on who is looking, doesn't it? Since we've been 'peeling back the layers of our onions', let's take it a little farther to the heart of the matter.

First, we noted that God designed our body to experience and express our spirit in relationships. What we do outwardly in relationships comes from our true heart inside, and what happens to us outwardly in relationships impacts our heart inside. Second, we identified four cycles of thinking, feeling and behaving in relationships. But there is a third and most basic principle: all of our thoughts, feelings and actions are based in a heart disposition of *fear* or *love*. And either reality can be difficult to accept. Those who've been abused may think that real love is just a myth. And 'tough guys' may have a hard time even saying the word 'fear' - they may be a little 'jittery' or 'uncomfortable', but never 'afraid'! Yeah, right.

The image on the next page is a two-sided plaque that hangs in my office representing two sides of our hearts: the side created by God for intimacy and the side damaged by sin. Both sides can outwardly express 'bad', 'mad', 'sad' and 'glad', but they come from different heart dispositions. I also dented and scratched both sides of the plaque to show that both sides have been damaged, but I sprayed a clear coating to seal in some dirt on the 'fear' side to show that both sides have very different 'feels' and that covering up really doesn't work.

The messages of the plaque are most powerful with my counselees when they see and say these for themselves. But for our purposes here, I'll share them with you so you can share and show them in Jesus' Body in W.A.I.T. training.



The plaque is based on 1 John 4:18 and tells us that fear seeks self-protection but love pursues relationship. Love may get dented and dirty, but it cleans out the dirt and stays open for intimacy (e.g., conviction by fear separates and covers up, but conviction by love seeks reconciliation). Note, too, that the ‘ups and downs’ of fear can be extreme because its sense of safety and hope are unpredictable. But love is more stable because of its openness and commitment. Lastly, fear’s end-goal is self-protection, so it naturally ends forlorn (sad because of loneliness). Love ends elated because its goal is intimacy. (1 Corinthians 13, especially verses 8-12)

Your sense of ‘bad’, ‘mad’, ‘sad’ and ‘glad’ reveal what you truly value. My anxieties numbed out by self-soothing, dismissed as passing sensations, can be blamed on others, or re-looked for potential insight. For I must Watch and Acept the reality of my heart if I am to Invest and Team differently to grow in His Body. W.A.I.T. training offers practical ways to discern our current hearts and exercise new hearts for Jesus. Nervous? Me, too. But consider the alternative to personal mindfulness and intentional relationships in the Lord Jesus.

Slavery, body and soul

Maybe you're not sure you want to read any further, much less exercise your body and soul under the stresses of small group exercise and heart-to-heart talks. I hear you. It's always easier to maintain our current state (body or soul) than to move beyond our comfort zone through growth pains. But before you decide to remain as you are, ask yourself "What treasures might I lose?" I'm not talking about things that God has commanded or promised. I'm talking about 'innocent' things that give you a sense of security, purpose pleasure or just numb your pain. What if you did lose them?

The parable of the rich man in Luke 18 teaches us several truths. 1) All of us have things that enslave us: our love of money, control of our time, knowing someone else's sin that seem greater than ours, our reputation with others, etc. 2) God will take those things from us eventually. And 3) the good news in verse 27 is that Jesus can break chains that we cannot.

By the inspired authority of God, Paul tells us that nothing should rule our body or soul but King Jesus Himself. Paul is so emphatic about it, he speaks of it in detail twice in the same letter (1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and 10:23ff). The first refers to our individual relationship with God while the second refers to the impact on our relationship with others. Both reveal the impact of such slaveries on our body, soul and relationships. God designed us for relational fitness, body and soul.

If we remain chained to anything less than Jesus, we will continue to react to our emotions, beliefs and relationships until we are either virtually insatiable (Jeremiah 2:13-25, Ephesians 4:17-19, etc.) or numb (Psalm 119:70, Jeremiah 6:15, 1 Timothy 4:1-2, etc.). What does Jesus want for you?

A peak head: Examples of W.A.I.T.ing in His Body

- **W**atch your body in physical & relational stress, and
- **A**ccept what you experience as spiritual realities:
 - that each of us has weak areas and strong areas
 - that we need to work, *and* we need to rest
 - that all parts of the Body need the other parts
 - that our parts need to be warmed to respond well
 - that our intake effects our output, for good or bad
 - that stamina is often more significant than power
 - that poor hygiene or sickness will hinder growth
 - that even the hardest bodies will break down
 - that physical and relation stress reveals our heart
 - that not everyone grows at the same rate, etc.

BUT . . .

- **I**nvest in real life according to the Word of God, and
- **T**eam with the Body of Christ for growth and joy:
 - by humbling ourselves and asking for help
 - by seeing His people as His Body
 - by believing that He made us just as He wants us
 - by enduring hardship as a process of maturity
 - by resting in the fact that He keeps working
 - by eating the food of His Word and His will
 - by embracing the pain of resisting the world
 - by expecting Him to care for His Body
 - by learning from Him and using His ‘tools’
 - by observing good ‘form’ as we work, etc.

Example Workout Dynamics

- Warm-up (to each other): 5-15 minutes
 - welcome partners, pray, loosen muscles, and stretch
 - only if you're ready, name your body's emotional disposition: *bad* (exposed) avoids; *mad* confronts; *sad* pauses or quits; and *glad* embraces or pursues
 - rate your disposition from 1-10 (or a -5 to +5 scale that is more vague which may free individuals' expression)
 - tell the group what your disposition is like in light of your understanding (right or wrong) of God's Word
 - tell your group how you want their help to exercise His Truth (using some of the 24 pictures of the gospel) to renew your mind in Him. You are part of His 'Body'.
- Workout (to expose hearts & express Truth): 30-60 minutes
 - maintain an elevated heart-rate and close proximity to others to stress your body and reveal your soul
 - watch your body and others for hearts to peak through
 - talk about your experiences and what God says about it
 - choose exercises to express His commands & promises
 - continue scaling to say where you are, where you want to be, and how you need help. When you scale changes (good or bad), say what that's like as part of His Body
 - scale the group as a whole and listen to each person say what we may be doing within and among us either to grow closer or 'dis-member' the Body of Christ
- Cool-down (your mind in Christ): 10-15 minutes
 - stretch & loosen up (physically & relationally) to come back to a "new normal" of interdependence in Christ
 - say exactly what helped renew your mind in Him
 - thank those who helped you and pray together
 - confirm the 5 "w"s of the next session, and follow-up
- Trust and follow Jesus, not this outline or program!

Recommended Exercise Formats

Of course, you're free to choose any types of physical exercise formats that may be helpful to you and your small group. I only offer the following as some concrete ideas to help you to begin integrating the exercise of body & soul in relationships.

1. "1-10, Black, Red, Blue, Green" – At the start of the group exercise, ask each person to scale themselves from 1-10 (least to highest) by each color. The colors represent their emotion, belief or action. They can say as little as they want (genuineness and relationship is the goal, but trust is crucial). At the end, self-scale again and ask about changes.
2. Scripture shirts – Use t-shirts with Scripture or Biblical images printed on them to spark discussion and prayer as you exercise. Your workout could have you facing each other (weightlifting, circuit training, sports, etc.), but if you're running, biking, etc. you could get creative and turn the Scripture or image to face the members behind you.
3. Dramatic exercises – Under stress, each of us *experience* what we truly *value* ("I want to quit because I value my image and muscle failure works against me"). But we can use also exercise to *express* what we *should* value: "lift" burdens to God; "push away" temptations; "run the good race" to Christian music, jump when God says "jump", etc.
4. Christian music videos – Use a DVD and large screen TV to 'talk' to you as you exercise in a spin bike class, yoga, calisthenics, etc. To keep it relational, you could pause the DVD to talk while you're working out or just journal your thoughts as you exercise and talk afterward around a meal. Either way, it's usually best to make it a group decision.

24 Pictures of the Gospel:

*Experiencing and Expressing
Life in the Body of Christ*

BALANCE - “True fitness is holistic”

Deuteronomy 6:5-9, Proverbs 30:7-9, Luke 10:27, 1

Corinthians 6:12-20, Ephesians 4:15-16, 1 Timothy 5:23



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

God calls us to live for Him in every area of our lives. See Deuteronomy 6:5-9 and Luke 10:27, for example. So often, however, we struggle for spiritual fitness because we focus only on some areas and neglect others. All of us are guilty of exercising only our strong points at times. But we need balance, and this applies to more than physical exercise.

For example, Proverbs 30:7-9 warns us against having too much or too little. Luke 10:27 reminds me that my love for God must be shown in my love toward men. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 tells us that God created us as physical and spiritual beings and that both must glorify Him. Ephesians 4:16 describes the parts of our bodies as interdependent, just like the Body of Christ - His people. And 1 Timothy 5:23 tells us to balance care for our physical well-being with our care for other believers' consciences. These are just a few examples of God's call to live as whole people. Still, it's easy to lose our balance in small things that become big problems.

If I'm honest with myself, I don't like working on balance. I prefer to do what I do well and avoid any potential difficulty. Most of us probably operate that way (although our strengths and struggles might differ). My story's not particularly gripping, but maybe you can relate it to your need for balance.

When I started lifting, I was about 13 and working on my parents' fish camp. Some of my responsibilities included pumping gas for girls in ski boats and cutting the grass around the swimming area where I could check out the girls. But I was nervous they might notice me, too - the skinny, pimple-faced teenager with thick glasses and big feet. When the summer heat got too much for me (or when I just wanted to hide from the girls), my only refuge was a quick dive into

nasty Lake Greenwood. But that only made my hair even more limp and oily. What a winner! As you can imagine, I wanted to find some way of becoming acceptable. And, being a teenager who was focused on looks, I thought my best hope would be in putting on some muscle.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was Mr. Universe back then, and I quickly memorized most of his weight-lifting routines to beef up a little. But just as quickly, I decided *not* to work my legs, abs, and cardio. I knew it would be an unbalanced program, but those exercises were just too painful! Besides, I got faster results with my upper body. So I poured myself into what girls seemed to want: bigger arms and a thicker chest. And for almost 30 years, I was happy with my physique - until 2002 when I was diagnosed with a pinched nerve and a herniated disk. Then everything changed in a matter of days.

All of a sudden, I couldn't carry the M60 machine gun on 4 mile runs with my battalion. Heavy rucksack marches were out of the question. But that was okay, since those things were getting more painful on my knees anyway. Remember, I really didn't care for suffering. It has been much tougher coming to grips with how my back surgeries have affected my ability to keep my weight down. In the past, if I ever needed to lose a few pounds, I simply ran farther. Now I have to run farther AND eat less. But I love to eat. In fact, that is another area where I struggle for balance.

Again, God made us to honor and enjoy Him in every area of life, so our goals and journey for 'fitness' must be balanced.

Yet, all of us still lean toward our comfort zones and lose our balance. For example, I'd rather read about hard

relationships than work through them face to face, and I'd rather do hard jobs myself than train others to do them. But shouldn't I be doing both? Bottom line: all of us like to do what we do well. It's just easier! Or is it? Success in the gym might come more quickly than success with my family, but what happens if I neglect time with them? Sleeping late might be more comfortable, but exercising before breakfast is the best time to burn fat. The journey for true fitness entails a constant awareness and pursuit of giving all of my life to Jesus. The following are a just few suggestions for Christian mindfulness, meditation, and exercise for greater balance.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God's creation (your body): As you think of 'balance', what do you notice? Mindfulness is a keen awareness of what is happening within us and among us. What *you* see in *you* may be different than what *I* see in *me*, but when I notice one part of my body is more developed than another and slow my thoughts, I realize that I am embarrassed of my partial strength. I want to hide from others! But God tells me to Acept His spiritual lesson that I *am* weak and that He designed me to need others. So I must . . .

Invest in the Body of Christ: I will meditate on Ephesians 4:16 about our connection within His Body! I don't need bigger arms. I need more humility and connection with others! I could use dumbbells instead of barbells and imagine one as my family and the other as my work. I might also alternate upper body and abs to remind me of the need for strength *and* perseverance. And I will . . .

Team with other believers who share the conviction to sacrifice their image and to balance their time. I will ask them to help me meditate and pray on related Scriptures.

Additional thoughts on ‘Balance’

Consider alternating *types* of exercises in a way that reminds you of the goodness of balance in your life. You could use push-pull routines, alternating sets of motions in opposite directions (such as leg extensions and leg curls, push-ups and bent-over rows, dips and standing rows, bicep curls and tricep presses, chin-ups and overhead presses). While moving back and forth between these ‘opposite’ exercises, you could meditate on seemingly ‘opposite’ areas of your life: jobs and families, body and soul, courage and tact, pushing yourself and resting, etc. Meditate on only one set of these areas at a time in order to focus more fully.

A deliberate “left, right, left, right” motion of dumbbells or your feet on cardio machines can also illustrate the need for balance in different areas of your life.

You can express balance in cardio, too: 15 minutes on the treadmill, 15 minutes on the stationary bike, 15 minutes on the elliptical, and make each one a time of prayer for places to which you ‘travel’ each day and the people you see there. Or try alternating an abdominal exercise that gives you a slow burn with upper-body sets that require sudden bursts of strength to help you meditate and pray for areas of your life in which you need to endure a slow burn and other areas that seem to require sudden spiritual strength. Be creative.

If it has been engrained in you to count repetitions, you might consider investing in a digital watch with a countdown timer. The best ones can be set to beep every minute or two (or 10 or 20, etc.). Look for specifications that tell you the watch can be set for specific increments of time and repeat countdowns

automatically. This may free you to focus on your experience and expression of the spiritual principles in the exercise.

If you're still focused on counting, consider applying a specific meaning to the counts. For example, sometimes I count to help me meditate and pray for specific people from the time they wake up to the time they go to sleep "5 . . . 6 . . . 7 . . . 8 . . . 9 . . . 10 . . . 11 . . . 12 . . . 1 . . .", etc. If the weight I'm using or speed I'm running is too much to count into high numbers, I may count in sets of 8, meditating and praying for 8 hours of work, 8 hours of family/leisure time, and even 8 hours of rest. You can exercise and pray for families of 6 in sets of 6, etc. And If I'm using dumbbells or some other form of exercise that may involve muscle failure, I use my fatigue to remind me to pray for their perseverance. I don't worry about praying specific words – I just visualize the person and the place and pray for them in my spirit. (Romans 8:26) God knows if I am giving thanks, praying for their salvation or praising Him for them.

I can't think of a single exercise that does not require some type of balance. When I bench press, I have to choose a weight that balances the strength of my arms versus the weakness of my chest muscles and vice versa. When I run, I have to choose a speed that balances the stamina of my legs versus the condition of my heart and lungs. When I do abdominal work, I have to balance the fitness of my muscles versus the limitations of my spine from surgery. The point is this: you don't have to go out of your way to choose formats that require balance. Simply recognize the need for balance in all your exercises, be honest with yourself and talk with your partners about what you're naturally experiencing, then be intentional to express the related truths in Jesus' gospel.

BREATH – “Take it in, give it away”

Genesis 2:7, Job 12:10, Job 32:8, Psalm 150:6, Ezekiel 37:9-10, John 20:21-22, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Revelation 11:4-11



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

After 25 years, I recently started playing trumpet again and I love it! But I forgot how much air it takes and what it does to me. If I practice the way I should, the air makes my lips tingle from their vibration; the corners of my mouth ache from keeping the air channeled into the mouthpiece and not letting it leak from the sides of my mouth; and after 20 or 30 minutes my diaphragm and back are exhausted from pressing my lungs for that strong, constant push of air. But part of my struggle is simply the result of not running lately. I can't enjoy the benefits of strong lungs if I don't keep them healthy. For a wind musician, running regularly or not can turn the everyday experience of breathing into a means of success or failure.

Breathing is so natural that I forgot that I needed to exercise my lungs for my trumpet playing. In fact, it's so natural that I almost did not think to include it in this book. Still, it is a powerful picture of life that must be reclaimed as imagery of the gospel. Genesis 2:7 says God breathed life into Adam; in Ezekiel 37 (a foreshadowing of the resurrection of God's people), God breathes life into the dead; John 20:22 tells us that Jesus breathed His Holy Spirit into the disciples; and in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul describes all Scripture as God-breathed. In each case, God's breath is His first gift that empowers us to live for Him.

Breathing is so simple but filled with messages from God. For example, every breath should remind us that we are constantly in need. The body can go weeks without food and days without water, but only minutes without air. Remember the 'Head' of the Body in Ephesians 4:15? - even if I hold my breath until I passed out, my head kicks in and tells my lungs to breathe again. So (on a side note) parents have little to fear when their toddler holds his or her breath as a bribe!

Our breathing not only pictures our neediness, it should remind us that God designed us to depend on each other and to share with each other. When you exhale, the green plants take the carbon dioxide in your breath and transform it into oxygen for me to breathe. Have I thanked you lately for breathing - even if you didn't brush your teeth this morning? LOL! It may sound a little silly, but hasn't God described us as members of His Body who need each other? Think of that when you're gasping for air! But seriously, sometimes when I run I meditate on my breath as His gift to "take it in . . . give it away . . . take it in . . . give it away" to remind myself that He breathed life into me so I can give His 'breath' (His *Word*) to others for their eternal life in Christ.

One of my mentors once told me that even the Hebrew word for God's name (YHWH) might be pronounced as an audible inhale and exhale, resembling the sound of breathing: "YH" (yah) and "WH" (weh). These are some of the few Hebrew letters in which the lips and tongue remain open for a constant flow of air. Maybe it's just coincidental, but it seems that just saying God's Hebrew name can remind me that – as it says in a Christian song – "This is the air I breathe: Your holy presence, living in me!"

Consider the many times and ways that our breathing becomes more labored: when we're afraid, angry, in pain, confused, scared, etc. Virtually any time we're under stress, we hear others tell us to "breathe". Not simply to move the air in and out but to "take deep slow breaths – in through your nose and out through your mouth". Why? When you take deeper breaths, you use more air sacs in your lungs, thus, getting more oxygen to your body. Again, a reminder that we need what only He can give.

Oxygen is energy, and focusing to draw more into my body can give me greater strength, calm, and even clarity of thought. After all, the brain is a physical organ, too! But at face value, slow deliberate breathing can seem foolish to anyone who may be watching. I mean, isn't that what *women* do right before they to give birth?! I am trying to sound foolish here to make a point: left to our own spirits, we like to look good and strong, not needy. Yet only by *focusing* on what we need can we seek after what we truly need!

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch what happens within you. As I breathe more slowly, I notice that my mind resists and starts to race with all the things I could be DOing. My muscles fidget, and I want to go accomplish something to feel worthwhile. An old memory verse comes to my mind that “even when we were dead in our trespasses, (He) made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5). Like CPR, God breathed life into me when I *couldn't* do anything! Because I need Him, I must . . .

Acept that this tension is often my fear of discovering my true spirit and being discovered by God. But God *already* knows me and breathed life into me anyway! So I will . . .

Ivest in His Kingdom by listening more to the Word that He has breathed (2 Tim 3:16-17) and be mindful that I can't do anything to bring myself to life. And I will

Team with other believers to praise our Lord Who gave us birth and rebirth by the gracious power of His breath, the Word. I will confess my need for Him, taking Him in and giving the gospel to others.

Additional thoughts on ‘Breath’

It might seem strange to be intentional about something that we do almost without thinking, but the very fact that we are usually unaware of our breathing suggests that we may need to be even *more* mindful to discern any bad habits and develop better habits. In fact, cultures around the world have incorporated intentional breathing into their spiritual faith and physical well-being for centuries. Scientific studies also confirm physical and psychological benefits to mindful breathing. Try the following suggestions in your workout to remind you of the life-giving breath in Jesus.

Most basic is a deep, relaxed inhale and exhale from your solar plexus (the small soft spot just above your abs and just below the upside down “V” of your ribs). A good inhale will feel relaxed, like a yawn in your throat and midsection. Your belly will naturally loosen and enlarge, drawing in the air that you need. The air from a good exhale will feel warm and moist, gently pressed from your solar plexus – like you would fog a window or mirror with your breath. Keep your chest and shoulders slightly raised but relaxed and try it.

When you inhale, take in the air that only God can provide. Meditate on the spiritual life that you also need from Him. Enjoy the sensation of the energy and peace that you feel in your lungs. If you are truly relaxed, your belly will draw in the air and your midsection will enlarge, which can be a little scary to all of us who are image-conscious. But even this experience can remind us that we must focus more on what we need than what others think. In fact, focusing on our image (keeping our “guts” in) might help us look more trim but will result in shallow breathing and less oxygen to our bodies. In

other words, physically and spiritually, we can't take in what we *need* if we keep up the façade that we don't need *anything*.

And when you exhale, meditate on the fact that God also designed us to give to others. When we 'give' CO², God has designed His creation to transform it into oxygen for others. Breathing is a picture of what we need and what we offer.

Watch your partners, too. You can encourage them when they are gasping for air during a run together. After the run, say "I saw you breathing hard. What was that like for you?" And help them express their heart by asking if they'd describe their experience as bad (fear of guilt), mad, sad, or glad. Then ask them to scale the intensity of it from 1-10 (or -5 to +5) and encourage them that you're listening. When you do this, you're helping them Watch and Acept the physical truths that they're experiencing as spiritual truths that should remind them of their need for Christ. Based on their response, help them Invest in God's commands and promises pictured in breathing and Team with you to live His Word as you work together as parts of the Body of Christ.

For example, on the next run you might encourage them that God is providing every breath that both of you need. Lead the way by lowering the intensity of the workout to focus on this fact and enjoy His gift of breath. They may be embarrassed that you eased off on your exercise for them. If they make jokes, change the subject, dominate the conversation or avoid you, they may be fearful, angry or sad. But that may be an opportunity to talk about one of the Scripture passages that pictures spiritual truths about breathing. If they're already feeling down, build them up by letting *them* choose to read or listen, to discuss or pray, to talk now or wait a moment, etc.

FLEXIBILITY - “Always be ready to turn!”

Exodus 32:7-10, Deuteronomy 10:16, 2 Chronicles 30:8,
Nehemiah 9:29, Psalm 32:8-9, Ezekiel 36:25-28, Zechariah
7:8-12, Acts 7:49-51



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

I used to believe that stretching was a useless part of exercise. As an enlisted man at Fort Drum in the mid 1990s, I only stretched because our Sergeants made us. In my mind, it wasn't exercise if it didn't make me stronger or faster. After all, if I can't feel my muscles growing or it doesn't help me lose any weight, it can't be all that important, right? But in the past few years, injuries and the aging process have begun to teach me that I don't have the option not to stretch.

When I was commissioned as an officer in 1998, I initially thought one of the perks was having a little more freedom to do PT on my own. In fact, in my first six years as a Chaplain I was assigned to smaller posts in Virginia and Germany where the staff officers were almost always on the honor system to do PT on their own, so I rarely stretched. But then we moved to Fort Campbell, and my physical training changed dramatically.

I had just come from my first tour in Iraq where I could still choose my own lifting routine, set my own running pace, and decide how much I wanted to push myself (or not). I was in pretty good shape but only in doing what I wanted to do. I hadn't worked on my flexibility. When I came to the Screaming Eagles, my Executive Officer (XO) re-introduced me to the Division mentality I had forgotten since my time with the 10th Mountain. Can you say 'pain'? Can you say, 'somebody help me, I'm cramping up over here!'"

Divisions are like humungous versions of the human body: they need their parts to act powerfully and precisely to do anything the 'Head' calls them to do ASAP. That's a good working definition for flexibility: being able to turn on a dime, especially in the face of danger. If your body suddenly

encounters danger and is not flexible, the parts of your body could easily be injured. And, as you can imagine, greater danger and less flexibility increases the risks. But I was “stiff-necked” and didn’t want to turn from my preferred routines.

My experience at PT with the 101st was mixed. I loved the upper-body workouts. Because of my longtime focus on my chest and arms, I could take whatever my XO dished out. But when it was a run day, I woke up with a knot in my stomach. I knew he would run us one of two ways: way long and moderately fast or just fairly long and crazy fast! I’d like to say that he was just unreasonable, but the truth is that I was just unprepared. I had been inflexible (or, to use Scripture’s description, ‘stiff-necked’) in what I liked to do. Looking back, it’s no surprise that I sprained my ankle twice and turned my knee once in the first months running at Campbell.

I began re-evaluating my opinion of warming up after I stepped into a pothole on a 5-mile run. Suddenly, the ground disappeared beneath me and - since I tend to run on the outside of my feet - all of my weight came down on the outside of my ankle. Problem! I had never conditioned my legs to respond to sudden changes with flexibility.

Warming my muscles to be more pliable was never a priority with me, but it is now. Life is full of sudden demands. We must be ready at a moment’s notice to respond wherever our Head calls His Body to turn. This is especially true where spiritual danger is involved. And, since every human being is a spiritual person with a natural ‘stiff-neck’ toward going their own way, I submit to you that there is always spiritual danger in you and around you (1 Peter 5:8).

Ask yourself, “how dangerous is the situation, and in what direction should I turn quickly: prayer? Scripture? Fellowship? I had never really thought of Scripture’s warning against being ‘stiff-necked’ until I began to study the parallels between physical and spiritual life. Flexibility is crucial, isn’t it?

In fact, change comes first by flexibility, not by ‘growth’. If you think about it, growth is just gaining more of what we already have. As I said earlier, cancer is a type of ‘growth’ that takes over your body. Simply doing *more* of what we’re already doing is like walking faster and stomping harder in the same circle. That just creates a deeper rut! To truly grow, we need to do something *different*. This is why the most successful workout plans involve muscle confusion: always keeping your body slightly surprised. Repentance is an "About Face!" - a 180 degree turn from self-focus to Christ-focus and His ways. This requires ‘flexibility’. How might you become more aware and meditate on flexibility?

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God’s creation for pictures of flexibility. For example, when I see a shortstop catch a baseball fired in from the outfield and then spin around to zing it home, I see flexibility in action. When I take time to do knee rotations and feel the synovial fluid being released into my joints, I feel the goodness of flexibility. I want the same for my spirit, so I will **A**ccept that God’s creation (my body) warns me about the risks of being “stiff-necked” or “hard-hearted”. I will **I**nvest in Christ by spending less time and energy spent on the “power” of my muscles in which I often trust and more time and energy on what seems less glorious: flexibility! I will **T**eam with other believers for opportunities to confess my need, invite them to the same goal, and support each other.

Additional thoughts on 'Flexibility'

No matter what exercise you do, warming up and stretching will prepare your muscles to work a fuller range of motions without unnecessary strain. There's an important principle in this. God's Word warns us against being 'stiff-necked' or 'hard-hearted' in relationships. Stretching can be an ideal time to reflect on parts of His Body that may be 'cold' or 'hard' due to neglect, abuse or stubbornness. So when you stretch your legs, think of where you will go today, who you'll see, and ask God to warm your hearts toward those relationships.

Because my chest is relatively strong, when I stretch my chest I try to think of areas in my life that I consider strong and pray that I would put my hope in *Him* and not in my *abilities*. I try to listen to my body but pray according to the commands and promises of His Word. He commands our hearts to be flexible to His Spirit and promises that lead us into blessing - even when His sovereign exercise of our hearts is often beyond our comfort zones and strangely painful (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

If parts of my body are stiff and take more time to stretch, I use that realization to pray for the parts of His Body (other believers) that may need more of my time to 'warm them up'.

We must prepare for exercise by stretching, just as we must prepare our relationships by prayer. But even after we've started our workout, we need to be flexible to work a full range of motion – all the way up and all the way down. Or do we prefer to limit our movements so we can handle more weight to appear stronger? Do you see the principle? We can *experience* good and bad spiritual messages by listening to our bodies, but we must *express* the truths of His Word – however and wherever we use our bodies. (Colossians 3:16-17)

Most folks who exercise also stretch *after* their workouts. This may lessen later soreness, increasing our ability and willingness to come back for more exercise later. It can also help to follow workouts by sitting in a whirlpool or sauna to increase blood-flow to alleviate soreness later. These can remind us of our need to follow up relationships with prayer and meditation on Christ's blood that purifies and strengthens us to alleviate pain in our spirits and relationships later.

Our choice of workout *formats* can also assist our meditation and physical exercise of flexibility. When our spirits are flexible, we are free to respond to God and change directions quickly. Consider running outdoors to increase your options to hear your body and to flex your workout at any time to stop for pushups to remind yourself of the need to be 'strong' in the Lord, to do jumping jacks to picture a stressful relationship that gets your heart racing without appearing to move forward, to jog backward to think on the importance of remembering from where Jesus brought you, etc. Formats of circuit training and swimming can provide similar flexibility to listen to our body and exercise spiritual truths of relationship.

And remember to stay flexible to your *partners* so you're not stiff-necked to 'my way or the highway'. Just as there are many ways to warm our muscles (wearing sweats, rubbing our muscles, sitting in a sauna), there are many ways to warm our relationships. Ask others what has worked for them in the Body of Christ, and pray for a flexible heart to hear them.

If you've been avoiding exercise with other believers because your fitness level is so different, flex your approach. Ask if they would be willing to hike with a heavier rucksack so you can stay with them, or offer to modify *your* workout for *them*.

FORM - “It is how we play that counts”

Genesis 32:20-32, Proverbs 16:8, Romans 12:, 1 Corinthians 9:19-27, Galatians 2:1-2, 2 Timothy 2:3-7

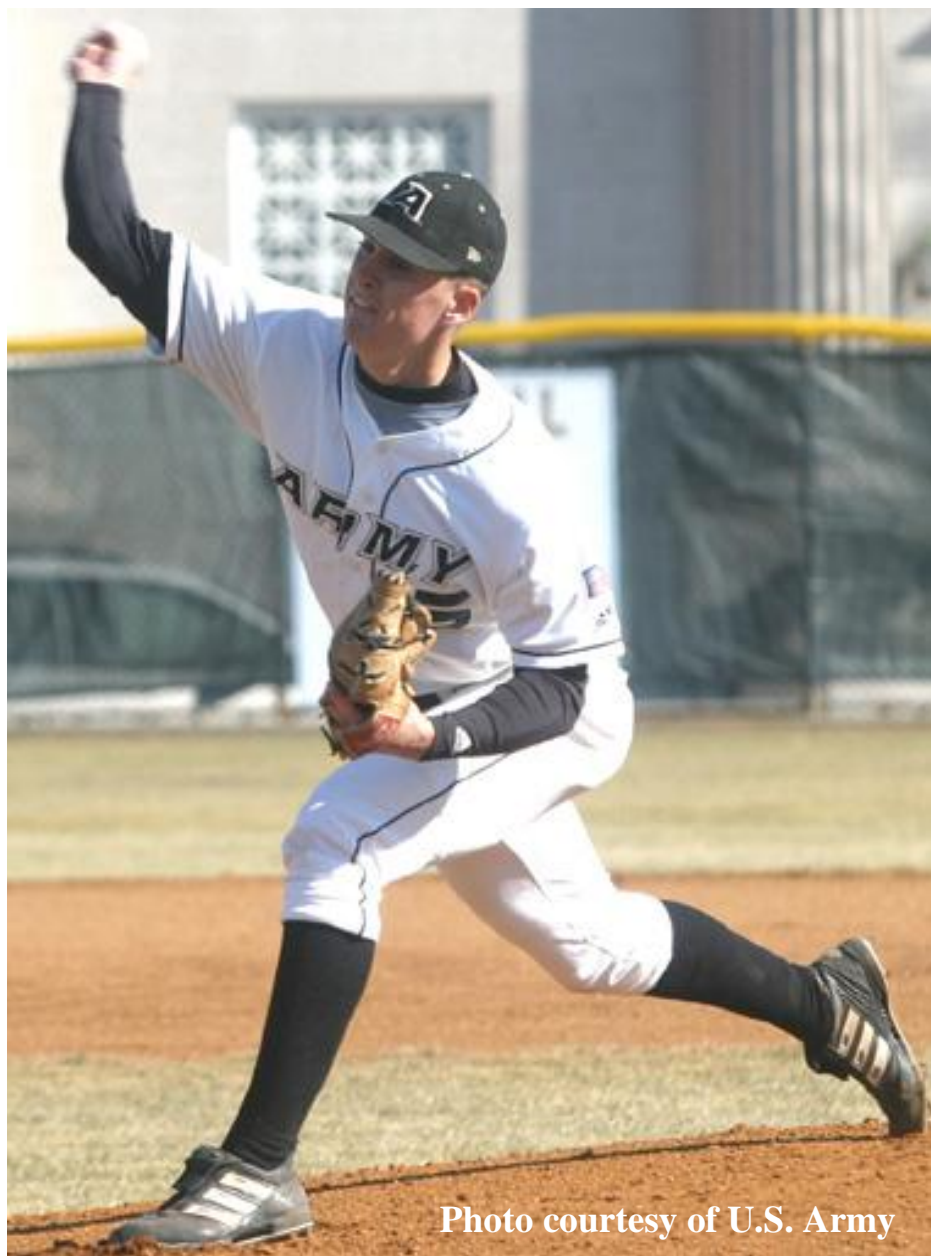


Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

During a P.T. test, has any Soldier *not* heard someone joke about cheating on the run? No matter how many times I've heard it, I still smile. Why? You might get an easy grader on your push-ups or sit-ups, but the distance is what it is. And the very fact that we joke about cheating raises questions. "Are we really interested in getting fit or just getting through one more PT test? And do we watch our form to work our muscles or hope a crowd will form to watch our muscles?"

As I write this, my body feels the signs of aging. The last three years of my military assignments have been strictly office work. My back aches after long hours and poor posture in my office chair. But, believe it or not, I miss the road marches and obstacle courses with Soldiers, and I'm eager to regain some of my physical fitness. Sometimes I'm so eager to be fit again that I find myself cheating on my form to give the appearance that I'm stronger than I actually am.

You know what I mean – rocking our upper bodies to swing those weights up on bicep curls, bouncing the weight off our chests (just a little) to pop the bar up a little faster on the bench, throwing our arms backward and forward for momentum on our sit-ups. But cheating on our form can work against us. Rocking back on those bicep curls can put pressure on your lower back and lead to injuries, and bouncing your bench press can even crack your sternum! Such scenarios are rare, though, requiring a LOT of weight, or long-term abuse. The greater problem is that cheating robs us of real growth!

Listen to Paul's advice to His second letter to his young apprentice. "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good Soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen

him to be a Soldier. And if a man also strives for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The farmer that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.” (2 Timothy 2:3-6). He pictures three vocations that require the workers to watch their form in order to reach their goals.

But is it fair that God says He will only bless our work if we do things His way? Doesn't that go against the Bible's teachings of salvation by His grace and not by our works? Absolutely not! I'm talking about obeying God so we can *enjoy* the work He accomplishes through us! (Esther 4:14)

The Lord made each of us in very specific ways so we can live in His image successfully and joyfully through Christ. Our only hope for real joy is to live as He designed us. But just in case you think you have better plans (as I do at times), think of yourself as a rocket ship designed by the Master Rocket Scientist. Our actions are like the actual flight, but like a rocket ship, we require power, direction, and a team. Our emotions are like the fuel that ignites inside to propel us heavenward. Our team must consist of those people who are like-minded about the flight plan and passionate about the mission. And our beliefs are like the guidance system: we can't get where we're meant to go if we try to input different information! Every aspect of our being is designed to work together for our success and joy in *God's* mission!

Form is critical to growth because God did design us in specific ways to function in harmony for Him. We're not cold machines. Every aspect of our being has been damaged by the effects of rebellion, so we need Jesus' work in us every day!

Mindfulness is the process of intentional self-awareness – specifically how our emotions, beliefs, and actions impact each other in our relationships. Christian mindfulness frees and inspires us by our meditation on God’s truth to interpret and inspire our relationships in the Body of Christ.

Yet, each of us has a tendency to love self above all else. Instead of our emotions, beliefs, and actions working together to walk with God daily, we tend to go into an “auto-pilot” of pride (self-love) or fear (self-protection). We must watch our ‘form’ to exercise intentional faith in Him and love for others. Take a moment to read Paul’s description of ‘form’ in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Our mindfulness in Christ must be constant and will meet resistance in our flesh.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God’s creation in you. When I notice my cycle of emotion, belief, and action right now, I feel sad about several hurting relationships and I want to be in control. I must Accept that God designed me to function in specific ways – as a husband, a father, a pastor, etc. – so I can’t necessarily trust my “auto-pilot”. I have to look to the guidance system that God provided for me. I will . . .

Invest in His Kingdom and ignore Satan’s guilt trip that “if you were a real man, you’d do whatever it takes to *make* things better”. Instead, I will serve my relationships in ways that honor Him and . . .

Team with fellow believers who will encourage me to trust God’s commands & promises and check my form in my relationships when I want to cheat by working only in my strengths.

Additional thoughts on 'Form'

This may be one of the most crucial and challenging of all the principles because many of us get defensive with “I know how to do this”, and we flip on our auto-pilot. But consider a very familiar chapter in the Bible that calls us to watch our form.

Even many non-Christians are familiar with 1 Corinthians 13, the Love chapter. There wasn't a lot of love among the Corinthians. The context of chapters 11-14 reveals that they were bragging or complaining over the greatest spiritual gifts and who had them. Paul called them to watch their form: *how* they exercised the Body of Christ. Reread those chapters and see for yourself. As we workout, *how* we exercise is crucial because we're also building our spirit of faith, fear, or pride.

When you workout, slow down enough to listen to your body. For example, are you trying to work beyond your present ability? If “leaning forward in the saddle” is your M.O. in the gym, you may be pushing some of your relationships, too. You may need to scale back a little before you run your body and relationships into the ground and reverse any progress! But if your M.O. is to hold back and only do what you can do well, maybe you're also holding back in your relationships. If so, pray for courage to express your love with more initiative. You will probably meet opposition, but if you're holding back to avoid conflict then personal peace can keep you stagnant.

How we do *some* things is probably how we do *most* things because *how* we live reveals and expresses our *spirit*. Instead of ‘performing’ a rep every second or running like a bat out of hell (pun intended), slow down enough to notice your spirit. If we rush workouts and don't take time to notice our form, there's a good chance that we're rushing our relationships and

not watching our form there, either. If we rock bicep curls, bounce bench presses, or only extend our arms partially in order to move more weight, we're neglecting our stabilizer muscles and increasing our chances of injury. If this is one of our M.O.s, we may be trying to move 'heavy' things in our life while neglecting the more subtle things God has entrusted to us: a little time, money, kindness, etc. It's tempting to use only our best. Give all of you, and watch your form. Gains are not as important as *how* we get there. "Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice." (Proverbs 16:8)

And work with your partners to exercise proper form and the spiritual truths that form represents. Your group should give everyone the complete freedom to Watch and Acept the physical realities of each other's form at any time. Our human nature is to present our work as the basis for acceptance in relationships. But this same reality of fear and pride is an opportunity to Invest in repentance in front of the Body of Christ by using the exercise in proper form and less showmanship to visibly express your new attitude and response in front of them. Then Team with them to accept their forgiveness and fellowship through the grace that lives in them because of Jesus' re-forming each of you in His image!

Remember to Watch, Acept, Invest, and Team regarding the wonderful things in each other's form, too. For example, "I noticed that you're remembering not to lock your knees when you stretch. That keeps the blood flowing to the parts of your body. Connection through the blood of Jesus is vital in His Body, isn't it!" or "You're doing a great job of working a full range of motion, even when you have to lower the intensity a little. What Scriptures remind you of the importance of proper form?" Then talk about and live out truths of the passage(s).

FUEL - “Input generally determines output”

Deuteronomy 8:1ff, Psalm 34:8 and 42:1, Isaiah 25:6ff and 55:1-2, John 4:13-14 and 6:35, Hebrews 5:12-14, 1 Peter 2:2-3



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Don't you hate it when reality jumps up and slaps you in the face? Maybe you've been there. Things seem to be going so well - it's almost as if the laws of the universe don't apply! But eventually, those same laws – in my case, the laws of the digestive system – eventually bring us back to earth.

In my first deployment to Iraq, I was doing a lot of regular, intense PT. Like most Soldiers, I used PT to help me adjust to the weather, to burn stress, and to keep my mind off the dangers around me and the life I was missing back home. On one such day, I worked out so long that I missed lunch before I realized it.

I was pretty hungry, but supper was still hours away. So I went to the snack section of the dining facility and scraped together a PB&J. The sugar rush felt nice, so I chased it with an ice cream. Life was good! Then, two hours later I lined up for chow. I had been trying to eat earlier so my food would have more time to digest and not gel around my waist - but not that night. We were having gyros, with that special Greek sauce that I love! And they were great, but I probably had one too many. Well, maybe I had three too many.

As you can imagine, I didn't sleep very well that night. Still, the next morning I got up as usual for my morning run. Nothing felt 'usual' though. I stretched for about 10 minutes until I realized that I wasn't going to feel better magically. So I just decided to suck it up and get started. I was about two miles into my run and "WHAM!" - my stomach locked up on me. Oh, the pain!! "What an idiot!" I wished that I could've turned back the clock a few hours. If I had only waited and exercised some self-control, I could've fueled up a lot differently.

Isaiah 55:2 warns us against fueling up on things that cannot satisfy. But the calories and fat in the PBJ, ice cream, and Gyros weren't the real problem. Sure, that much rich food wasn't good for me. But if I worked hard enough, I could burn that off - eventually. My real problem was in turning to physical things to satisfy a craving in my spirit.

Yes, initially, I felt a physical hunger, but the peanut butter & jelly satisfied that need. Looking back, I had the ice cream because I wanted to feel rewarded for my workout. Also, the past few months I had been a little depressed at a missing my family and not making much progress in ministry, but the gyros reminded me of Germany where I had my first gyro - where I had felt good about my time with my family and my accomplishments. Contrary to popular belief, men can be guilty of emotionally eating, too!

Good fuel helps us meet our real needs. But the flood of fat and sweets *hindered* my needs: my sleep, my PT, and my concentration for the day. What if I had fueled up by chewing on God's promise to "work all things for the good to them that love God, to them who are called to His purpose" (Romans 8:28)? Can you imagine being sluggish or distracted from taking in too much encouragement in Christ?!

We need to ensure that we're getting the good stuff. But proper self-care is not our natural tendency. Take water as an example. As a grown man I got really tired of hearing others remind me to 'drink water!' in Iraq. Still, just a little later in the same deployment, I became mildly dehydrated, and I felt pretty stupid. Again, I had been working hard on my PT. But this time I had been making almost no progress. My run time was slower, and I was weaker in the weight room. Then, after

a sudden rise in the heat, everything magically changed! I started drinking several big bottles of cool water for a few days - not because I thought I was dehydrated – just because I was a little warmer than I wanted to be. And “out of nowhere” I began feeling a lot better. I had more energy; I was more alert during the day; and I slept better that night. The next day, I went for a run, and I felt as if I could’ve run forever!

What made the difference? Water! Water helps our blood carry nutrients and oxygen to our muscles, enables our electrolytes and brain synapses to function properly, and assists our stomach acid to break down our food. We need water to live! No wonder Jesus called Himself “living water” in John 4:10-38! When His Spirit flows in us, He clarifies our thoughts, strengthens our wills, and enables us to grow. How’s your intake of God’s Word lately? Do you crave Him as the deer pants for the water? (Psalm 42:1)

Think about some of the spiritual and relational implications of what you’ve just read: because Jesus is our living water, we are to ‘drink in His Word’ and crave His Spirit. As our bread of life, we are to chew over His Word to give our souls the nutrition and strength to function properly. We are to swallow even the hardships that He ordains for us to break down the stubbornness inside us. Only by taking in all of Him will we have what we need to live. Isn’t this the very picture of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper?

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God’s creation. Where are you turning for fuel?

Acept that He made you for Him, not the world’s junk food!

Invest in His Kingdom by “feeding” well (John 4:14 & 6:36).

Team with others who have the same appetite for Christ!

Additional thoughts on 'Fuel'

Most doctors agree that it's a sound principle to drink or eat what your body needs *first*. Dessert and snacks should come later, if at all. Fill yourself with water, fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grains, low fat proteins (fish, egg whites, low fat dairy products, chicken, etc.), and eat slowly. Our body's nervous system needs about 20 minutes for our brain and stomach to talk to each other and communicate that we've had enough. If we eat too quickly, we're more likely to overeat.

If we need to pace our consumption and monitor our nutrition, this can also raise the questions, "Are we pacing ourselves to take in what God has provided, or are we just cramming ourselves with whatever is close?" Are we deciding our spiritual and relational diet by whatever pleases us, or are we referring to His menu to discern what's good for us? Are we taking our time, trusting that He will provide the next course or are we stuffing ourselves fearing that we must really take care of ourselves? (Exodus 16:12-24 and Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

Our physical 'auto-pilot' can reveal our actual convictions – true or false, good or bad. All of us tend to turn to physical things to recharge us when we're down, but do we *need* or just *want* them? We must eat the foods that we know are good for us, stop when we're satisfied (as opposed to stuffed), and accept the hard reality that any 'hungers' that remain may reflect a spiritual war. These are practical ways to express that God tells us what we need; He will provide what we need; and life in Christ means turning from slavery to the world.

Remember, too, that we have to fuel up *before* we need fuel. If we wait until we're empty to feed on God's Word, to drink in His Spirit, to enjoy His sacraments, and to fellowship with

His people, it may be too late to find the strength we need in that moment. We must be proactive to keep a steady diet in the Body of Christ. When we fill up on what we need, we'll have less room for tempting physical and spiritual junk.

We must also be intentional to fill our souls with relationships that encourage our spirits. All of us need foods with proteins to repair and build muscle and fruits and vegetables with natural sugars for energy. In the same way, let's be intentional to take in relationships that repair and build our joy in Christ.

Legumes and grains give us fiber to assist digestion and provide slow-burning energy for perseverance. Shouldn't we be just as intentional to take in relationships that help us break down life into bits that we can stomach so we can keep going?

Water replenishes us when we've given of ourselves in daily living and helps flush impurities from our system. Shouldn't we be just as intentional to drink in relationships founded on Living Water to renew and cleanse our spirits?

Maybe your group could have a meal together after your workouts. You could talk about food choices and even plan, purchase, and cook the meal together at your local church or chapel. You could also organize a community run with W.A.I.T. training T-shirts and follow up with a continental breakfast of boiled eggs, whole grain cereal, gluten-free alternatives, juice, fruit, oatmeal, etc. Then have one of your group members give a brief devotional from Scripture on the importance of God's Word and Spirit being our "fuel".

GENES - “Born to . . . ?”

Exodus 4:10-11, Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, Jeremiah 13:23, John 3:6-7, 1 Corinthians 12:14ff, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

“I was built for comfort, not for speed.” Maybe you’ve heard someone say that when joking about their physique. Maybe they said it because they were truly content with their body shape, or maybe they were trying to avoid talking about a painful subject: their ‘destiny’ because of their genes.

Each of us has our own unique genetic limitations and potential. Some people are born with broad shoulders and others will never reach 5 feet tall. But few natural power-lifters (short, stocky people) will easily and successfully shape their God-given tendencies toward a different type of fitness and become great marathon runners. Some things, like body types, are simply beyond our ability to change. So what is our potential – physically and spiritually? And what if we’re not satisfied? Maybe you’re beginning to realize that all of the 24 pictures of the gospel are inter-related: ‘genes’, ‘image’, ‘maturity’, etc. So what does God say about our ‘genes’?

As I mentioned before, when I was teenager I wanted to look like Arnold Schwarzenegger. When I noticed that I was getting taller but not any thicker, I was a little depressed. But when I noticed that we were the same height, I figured there was a chance. Great logic, huh?

Still, I bought his book, followed his advice, and kept a journal. And I was making progress and feeling good, except for one thing. His chest muscles looked like two concrete blocks forming a deep, straight crevasse between them. Mine had a gaping hole like someone had taken an ice cream scoop to my chest. When I asked a friend how I could fill it in, and he said, “You can’t. You’d have to be born-again by Arnold Schwarzenegger’s parents for that to be possible.” Wow! What a perfect picture of the gospel!

For us to have a new ‘genetic’ potential, we need a new Father. And that’s exactly what Jesus says in John 3:3. Some versions of the New Testament translate His original statement as “ye must be born *again*” and others render it “ye must be born from *above*”. In fact, the original language can be translated either way. Maybe that’s intentional to show the same truth in two different ways: real change must come by truly starting over, but it’s not enough to have physical potential, human will or others’ desires (John 1:12-13). The new source must also be a spiritual re-creation from God.

Physical genes can provide a foundation only for physical potential, but when we are born again we have a new spiritual potential from our new Father! And, just as He creates all children physically different from each other, He recreates His spiritual children with different expressions of their potential. So what is our potential? Consider 1 Corinthians 12.

Verses 4-13 remind us that, even though God re-creates us with different spiritual abilities (supernatural giftedness in discernment, teaching, etc.), the source of all these is His Spirit and the unified purpose is the common good of His people (vs. 7). Sounds pretty good so far, right?

Now remember to be mindful – ‘open’ to whatever God pours into our lives. Notice verse 11. Our Lord also gives different *portions* of these gifts to each of us. Does that mean He makes some people great at something and others only good at the same thing? Yes! Romans 12:3ff is even more specific that God gives us different “measures of faith”. Does that mean He re-births some who will be virtually fearless and others who will struggle against fear? It seems so! But why?!

The twelfth chapter of both letters point to God's design for His Body: joyful interdependence under its Head, Jesus. Look at verses 14-21 in the letter to the Corinthians. Paul recognizes that some are dissatisfied with the 'genes' they received from their Father and are envious of others. Others seem to be boastful as if they received what is most important. But verses 22-26 require us to be especially mindful and open. Have you considered that He may have created you or me as 'weaker', 'less honorable', or 'un-presentable' so that we need others' strength or special attention? Humble me, Lord! There will be times that I need others more than they need me!

Physically, a son or daughter might not like the freckles or frizzy hair from their biological Dad. We might also feel that we're "stuck" with what our heavenly Father has given us as His spiritual children. But 1 Corinthians 12:18 tells us that "now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him". God created His Body for interdependent relationships of love.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God's creation for your uniqueness. How might you need other members in the Body of Christ? To whom should you go for help and how?

Accept what you see as reminders to seek spiritual fitness and Invest toward the goal of interdependent relationships among the members of His Body. Look for opportunities, and . . .

Team with other believers. Weaknesses are opportunities to grow by others' help. Strengths are cues to responsibilities. And if you aren't growing in His likeness, consider the possibility that you've been trying to grow spiritually in the power of your flesh. Ask Him to forgive and recreate you. He adopts on the spot! (Romans 8:13-39)

Additional thoughts on ‘Genes’

Few of us like everything about our body. I’ve never enjoyed working my legs because they’re under-developed and harder to work than the rest of my body. Still, I have to work what my body *needs* and not just what I can do *well*.

Try to find exercises that you're able and willing to do which work the difficult parts of your body. Listen for your emotion over those parts of your body. Then think of loved ones God has given you who love you in *spite* of these so-called ‘short comings’ (in your view). In other words, focus on His *grace*!

Consider how He has even used the parts of your body that you don’t like to build you up in Him. I know that He used years of others’ insensitive jokes about my big feet to reveal my bitter spirit, lead me to repentance and give me greater compassion on others in similar circumstances. Listen to your body’s experience of spiritual realities in your life – good and bad - but *use* your body to express *God’s* truth for His Body.

You can also think of *others* who do not like themselves and the people you don’t like, so you can pray to love *His* whole Body. Then meditate on spending intentional time with them as you spend time exercising the parts of your own body that need some lovin’. If we see the goodness of working our whole body – even when it’s difficult – shouldn’t we exercise the whole Body of Christ, even when it’s difficult?

On the other hand, you may have other body parts that you enjoy for their beauty, strength, coordination, etc. As you exercise, meditate on how to use your strengths (physical or otherwise) to serve others. If your upper body is strong, how could you use your strength to help your spouse with chores

around the house? If you have lots of energy, are there co-workers or neighbors who need your help? If you are knowledgeable in a specific area, who could you coach? The key is to remember that *all* of our being is designed by God for service to Him in godly relationships with His people.

Because so many of us are body-conscious about some part of our body that God has given us (or not given us), talking with each other about our genes can be a potentially sore topic. So we need to be especially prayerful about our own heart and mindful of what the other person may say to us. Consider trying some of the following to open dialogue about each other's bodies and continue dialogue about the Body of Christ:

- “Earlier, several of us named parts of our bodies that we don’t like. As we’re exercising, do you feel more ‘bad’, ‘mad’, ‘sad’ or ‘glad’ about that part of your body? How intensely do you feel that on a scale of 1-10 (or -5 to +5?)?”
- “Or how about parts of your body that you do like? How ‘glad’ are you and how’s that affect your genuineness?”
- “As we’re working our _____, I’m reminded that Paul often described God’s people, the ‘Body’ of Christ. And he included the ‘important’ parts like the eyes, ears, hands and feet but also the ‘weaker’ and ‘unpresentable’ parts. What does Jesus think of your _____, and how might He be calling you to be part of His Body as you are?”
- “How has God used your _____ to mold your spirit as part of the Body of Christ? If your _____ were different, how might your spirit and relationships be different?”

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

HUNGER – “I am starving for . . .”

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, Nehemiah 9:15, Proverbs 16:26, Psalm 34:10, Matthew 5:6 & Luke 6:21, Romans 16:18, Ephesians 2:1-10 (esp v. 3), Philippians 3:19



Photo courtesy of Google Images

God's Word says lots of positive things about hunger. He tells us we're to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6), and Moses reminded Israel that God even *caused* them to hunger to show that only He truly satisfies. (Deuteronomy 8:3) But God's Word also says that some worship their hungers by bowing down to their physical desires. (Philippians 3:19) What do you think about that? Are our 'hungers' good or bad?

Most of us tend to do whatever it takes to make any sense of emptiness go away: we eat something salty or sweet, go running, listen to music, etc. If the craving remains, we may begin to feel weaker, nervous, or angry, and who knows what will happen then! The picture of the Soldier praying during a time of fasting is intended to show the overwhelming impact of going without on our body and soul. We *don't* know the nature of this Soldier's emptiness or how he tried to fill it later. But two things are sure: we'll never know the nature of our emptiness until we go without, and only Jesus can fill us.

We tend to think that hunger is a bad thing, but God *created* our bodies with neurotransmitters to feel 'hungry'. These microscopic chemicals help our nervous system and the rest of our body communicate what is wanted or needed. Serotonin makes us feel sleepy and reduces sexual interest; noradrenalin and epinephrine give us more energy; dopamine creates sensations of pleasure. Opioids and endorphins even act as painkillers. God designed our bodies to experience and express these "feel"ings. But how are we to respond?

God created our feelings to act as built-in alarms, reading physical sensations and signaling our souls to "run away!" or "come closer!" But our perceptions are also warped by our sinful nature, and our desires may be wounded by experiences

of others' sins. Sometimes my racing heartbeat or the knot in my belly tells me to run away from my wife when she's crying, but that may be the time we need to be closer. And the heat in my face and tension in my muscles may tell me to yell at my children who just criticized me, but those are very times that I need to hear the deeper concern of their hearts.

First we need to distinguish the *type* of hunger. Some are about actual survival: food, exercise, sleep, etc. *until* we go to *extremes*. Some may be appropriate for a specific situation, like sex in marriage (see 1 Corinthians 7:2-5) or a little wine for a bad stomach (1 Timothy 5:23). But other "needs" should raise immediate red flags: addictive drugs, constant audio/visual stimulation, compulsive piercings, cutting, etc. The fact that we seem to "need" more and more of something but are satisfied less and less with it reveals the core truth: physical things cannot satisfy spiritual hungers.

Yes, food, actions, even meditation can release those neurotransmitters for the feelings that we want, and we must beware of simply hungering for the feelings themselves. But the chemicals (neurotransmitters) are not the devils that make us do it. The problem is that we choose to feed our *flesh* instead of satisfying our spirits in *Christ*. It may seem odd, but God's people are *supposed* to feel hungry in the war of the flesh and spirit (Galatians 5:16-17). If our flesh always feels satisfied, it's because we are satisfying our flesh!

Hunger is a form of suffering, and our flesh tempts us to escape by 'salvation' from physical pain through physical sensations of comfort, strength, reward, etc. But Isaiah reminds us that we can only find satisfaction in God (Isaiah 55:1ff), and Jesus tells us that those who hunger for

righteousness will be filled (Matthew 5:6). Only the re-Creator of our spirits can fill our spirits. Our flesh needs to remain hungry. If we feed the monster, it will certainly grow!

These hungers are so powerful that we can confuse them with our emotions. Emotions (as I define them) are bodily experiences of our beliefs about relationships. Hunger is just the experience of being unsatisfied. But satisfying our flesh cannot lead to true fulfillment – in this sinful world, we will *always* feel some physical dissatisfaction! When we feel angry, we may attack a perceived enemy to satisfy our hunger for justice. Muscles tighten, hearts pound, and we physically lean toward the person, but are they the right ‘enemy’? Fear feels similarly but leans away to satisfy a hunger for safety. Sadness drains us and embarrassment tingles in our face, but we can’t satisfy our hunger until we know what truly satisfies.

It’s hard for me to accept that hunger can be good, but Isaiah 58 says God calls us to fast to experientially remind us of our frailty and the goodness of turning to God. Hunger is designed to be a physical and spiritual alarm. It’s important that we don’t confuse that system. When I’ve had too little sleep and too much coffee, it’s difficult to tell if the tension I feel at work is a hunger for peace that only Jesus can fill or simply the result of poor diet. Probably both. Again, holistic fitness is physical and spiritual. And we can’t be mindful of God’s voice if we pollute His alarm system and temple.

It helps me to read Hebrews 2:17 and see that Jesus suffered when He went without. **W**atch your body. For what do you hunger? **A**cept the spiritual message, and **I**vest in how His Kingdom satisfies your spirit. **T**eam with other believers who hunger for Him. Jesus satisfies on His terms!

Additional thoughts on 'Hunger'

This one is tough for me, and not just in the area of literal food. When I feel empty, I sometimes feed my spirit with fresh air, spicy food, relaxing music, exciting movies, my wife's kisses, etc. All of these bring me 'senses' of peace (all 5 puns intended). And there's nothing wrong with that - until my desire to satisfy my *senses* becomes my priority or physical things become my *hope* for satisfaction. Again, we will never experience our good hunger for God if we're already stuffed with things of this world. (1 John 2:15-17)

In Ephesians 4:17-24 and 1 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul describes this idol of sensuality as futile thinking - a darkened understanding (without God's light) that results in a calloused (non-feeling) heart. Isn't that ironic? Cravings for *more* bodily satisfaction actually results in feeling *less*! I can't remember who first said "if it feels good, just do it", but that is absolutely bad advice! Romans 12:17-21 reminds us that God designed painful feelings, too - for the good goal of *repentance*!

But let's not be too quick to say that only *non-believers* need to 'feel the burn'. Isaiah 58 seems to say that the purpose of fasting is for professing *believers* to weaken our flesh in order to experience our true spirits and lead us into specific forms of repentance. Again, we cannot know our true spirits if we dull or pacify our bodily senses with the things of this world.

In fact, the Apostle Peter tells us that we cannot break the cycles of sins without suffering in our flesh. (1 Peter 4:1) This is not just *delaying* gratification - it is *denying* our flesh as our source of gratification and re-directing our hearts to Jesus.

Our Lord said that His food was to do the work of the Father (John 4:34). May we find our nourishment & joy in the same.

So, the next time we're feeling spiritually empty, instead of reaching for physical satisfaction, let's reach out to someone in our group and talk to them about how we're feeling. Let's ask them for encouragement from Scripture and prayer support. Then they might point us to the specific ways that only Jesus can satisfy: belonging, security, purpose, and more. Or we could confess "When I'm tired and want a pick-me-up, I'm afraid of what could happen if I don't satisfy the longing." Could we be trying to avoid the pain of failure later because of our low energy level now? Maybe we're afraid that our temper would show or we couldn't maintain our usual happy face. Do we believe that we just deserve a treat for what we've done lately (or because of what others have *not* done for *us*)? Talk with each other about these concerns.

Physical hungers can be signals of spiritual emptiness or pain – God-given warning signs that we need something. And our bodies can tell us *that* we need something, but only God can tell us *what* we need. Listen to your body but trust in His Word to guide you and His Spirit to strengthen and satisfy.

When we know specifically for what we hunger, we can begin to help each other find our satisfaction in Christ. Are you or one of your group members hungry for meaning? His Word reveals His progressive work to save a people for Himself. Personal value? We have value because He made us and can re-make us. Affection? His Spirit warms our spirits with peace beyond our own understanding and fills His Body so we can care for each other. Don't limit your relationships to the gym or field. Study His Word and worship together. See and experience how He satisfies our hungers in the Lord's Supper taken together. Jesus satisfies the hungers of His Body. What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

HYGIENE - “Sickness hinders growth”

Isaiah 64:6, Ezekiel 16 (whole chapter) and 36:25-27, Daniel 1:5-19, Zechariah 3:1-4, Matthew 15:1-11, John 13:1-17, Acts 11:1-18, Hebrews 10:19-22, James 1:16-21



Shortly after my unit arrived in Kuwait before Operation Iraqi Freedom, a lot of us came down with the “Kuwaiti Crud”: chills, aches, etc. I thought it was from the smallpox vaccine we’d just received, but some were sick before they got their shot. Others got it weeks later. Eventually our whole tent was incapacitated. Spiritual crud can be contagious, too.

Our choice of friends, for example, can either be a booster shot to our souls or a giant step toward heart disease. We must be kind to everyone but choose our close friends carefully. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, Paul compares close relationships to a ‘yoke’. If you’re not familiar with the term, a yoke is a device that farmers use to bind two oxen or mules together so they pull in the same direction. There’s a great spiritual lesson about purity in this picture – if we will listen.

As I see it, there are at least three types of relationships: leading, following, and collaborating relationships. And each one must be concerned about purity, whether we’re looking for someone to lead us, support us, or work with us. As God’s people, we should actively seek all three but only as would please our Lord according to His Word. For example, we need to disciple others, share our lives with fellow believers, and follow those who are farther along in their journey with Christ. But we can’t walk with a person who pulls in a different direction. If we tie ourselves to non-Christians and try to pull them to God, we might speak the truth but I doubt they will hear it as love. And if their pull is greater than our ability to resist, we may catch some of their spiritual crud.

It’s not that we’re better than ‘dirty’ people – none of us is clean except in Christ. It’s a matter of spiritual health and joy. We can’t have either if we’re sick with the effects of sin.

A lot of things boost our strength and joy when we're deployed – good chow, mail from home, MWR stuff, etc, but most of us wouldn't normally put hygiene in the top 10. Like insurance, hygiene is costly to maintain and many of us really don't see the importance of it until we need it. It's not that we don't want it or need it. We *expect* it! Can you imagine not having fresh water to brush your teeth, wash your hands after using the latrine, or de-funk your armpits after a long day in the sun? Most Soldiers have been there, done that, and those deployed now probably still wear the stinking T-shirt!

No one likes to be dirty. Filth is uncomfortable; it stinks; it invites infection; and it tends to separate us. The same spiritual problems should motivate us to seek purity within us and among us. When our souls are soiled with hate, fear, arrogance, lust, etc., we tend to want distance from others and especially from God. If you've been reading this book straight through, by now you probably understand that we also disconnect from ourselves to the point that our body and spirit do not communicate as God designed. Our 'feel'ings get confused or we just numb out because the pain is too great.

You may remember Shakespeare's scene in which Macbeth frantically tries to wash the blood from his hands to cleanse himself of murder's guilt. But he couldn't. Water can't wash the soul, and today's good deeds can't remove yesterday's stains of sin. Look at Matthew 8. Jesus came to "unclean" people and reached out in the compassion and power only He can offer. He meets our heart's need for cleansing and purity.

Do you ever feel like a spiritual leper? Jesus is willing and able to take your stains upon Himself and wrap you in His purity. Only He can clean us of guilt and wickedness. Put

your faith in Him, just like the words of the old hymn: “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!” But even after He cleanses us from all past, present, and future stains, sometimes we still make our way back to spiritual mud.

During one of my deployments, I walked into our little shower trailer and noticed a Soldier from a new unit running our precious water for over 5 minutes in his shower. We were authorized one shower every 72 hours, and there were signs all over the walls instructing us to “get wet, turn the water off, lather up, rinse off, and get out” to conserve water. My unit had been deployed for months, and these new guys had been in country for mere days. Yet they stood in front of us in the phone line ‘needing’ to talk to their spouses. And now this! I fumed in my soul, but I had to pray for myself because I, too, needed to be cleansed - of the hate I felt toward this man. And as I stood there trying to focus on Jesus, I couldn’t help but notice the smell of the shower trailer. Even with restricted water use, our drainage system couldn’t handle the runoff and the pooling dirty water stunk more each day - a powerful reminder that we can’t depend on our abilities to wash away our problems because the problem is often our own hearts.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God’s creation, wonderful, warped & wounded. What is the impact of hygiene that you see in your relationships?

Washing your hands, coughing up phlegm to purge your system, God’s world is full of pictures of our need for purity.

Accept that, *whatever* you notice, you must respond to it. In Romans 2:1, Paul tells us that at whatever point we condemn others, we are guilty of the same things.

Invest in Jesus. Only He can clean us up. And . . .

Team with other believers who want to be clean in Christ, too.

Additional thoughts on 'Hygiene'

'Hygiene' raises all kinds of practical pictures of relationship: showering and using deodorant after exercising, brushing my teeth before I come to bed with my wife, smelling the leftovers before I feed them to my children (just kidding - mostly), but also filling my mind with thoughts of Jesus' purity (Matthew 5:8) and praying for His protection from the infection of fear, lust, vengeance, etc. in this fallen world. (Psalm 119:9-11)

We must keep clean for physical health *and* relationships. Some things we must do to ward off *sickness*. Others things we should do to keep our *relationships* healthy. So the next time you're putting a band-aid on a cut or grooming yourself in front a mirror, turn it into a time of *inner* reflection. Slow down enough to mediate on the *reason* for what you're doing. Here are few examples of what that might look like.

If you've been picking out your own toothpaste, body wash, and other smell-goods, can you let your loved ones choose instead? Aren't they the ones we should please anyway? Open yourself to their suggestions. These might be different than what you would have chosen, but your love will be focused more on them than on self. Or if your razor doesn't shave you as closely as you'd like, maybe the imperfect shave can be an all-day reminder that you're not perfect and to pray for humility and courage to do your imperfect work and trust Christ with the results!

If you or your loved ones often have injuries, illnesses, or other physical problems but you continually put off going to see a doctor, are you downplaying the importance of the body? Remember that our bodies are His temple. (1 Corinthians 6:19) Did you know that the disciple, Luke, was a doctor?

Paul seems to have taken him along to care for a painful eye disease (2 Corinthians 12:1-9, Galatians 4:15 and 6:11). See? (pun intended), it's not unspiritual to care for our bodies.

On the other hand, some people *only* focus on the physical. If I or my loved ones are frequently depressed, feel anxious, suffer from hypertension, headaches and stomach aches, irritable bowels, impulsivity or inattentiveness, etc. and my *only* or *first* course of action has been to seek medication, then I may be neglecting the reality of spiritual help such as prayer.

I'm not primarily talking about demonic influences, although Scripture teaches their reality. I'm talking about the reality of how our beliefs impact our bodies. Medical studies estimate that up to 70% of patient concerns may be psycho-somatic (mind-body). Does that mean there's really nothing wrong with them or does it show that our spiritual beliefs (what's right & wrong, true & false) clearly impact our bodies?

Maybe you believe God doesn't listen to 'dirty people' so you've stopped spending time with Him. And now your body is in knots from the *feeling* (belief) that you're not loved. Purge your body of worry and fill it with hope in Him by going back to God in His Word. Matthew 6:5-6 reminds us that He cleanses those who trust in Him.

Most of us spend lots of time cleaning and protecting our bodies that just keep getting dirty. Shouldn't we spend at least as much time taking care of our spirits and relationships that will last forever? Psalm 51:7 says that when God washes us, we will be whiter than snow. Meet with His people to encourage and strengthen each other about our purity in Christ. (Acts 2:42-47 and Hebrews 10:19-25) Amen!

IMAGE - “It depends on who’s looking!”

Genesis 4: 21-22, 26, 1 Samuel 16:7, 2 Samuel 14 (Absalom’s whole life story), Proverbs 31:30, Song of Songs 1:6, Jeremiah 9:23-24, 1 Corinthians 13:12, James 1:22-25, 1 Peter 3:4-5



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Image is a powerful influence in most cultures. How many magazine covers are air-brushed to remove facial blemishes, shrink waistlines, and enhance the looks of men and women who are already *naturally* attractive? Our culture seems obsessed with a fantasy image of perfectionism. Remember when HDTV first came out? Many of these same models and entertainers expressed concern that they could no longer live up to this fantasy image.

Mankind's concern for physical appearance is nothing new. In Song of Solomon 1:6, a woman said she was worried that her lover might look down on her because of her dark skin – the result of her brothers having forced her to work their fields, probably while they stayed in the shade where it was cool. Even today, many cultures value lighter colored skin as a sign of power & privilege – those who had others to do their work.

Putting image ahead of God is as old as Babel in Genesis 11:4 where people wanted to make a name for themselves and draw others to them. Sound familiar? Most of us spend at least some time, money, and effort pursuing a better image. In the military, one of the most popular ways of pursuing a good image is exercise. Each time I deployed, I spent a lot of time in our homemade gyms. The exercise helped me relieve internal stress, but it was also my attempt to build my self-confidence. I got compliments from Soldiers in the gym and great feedback from my wife when I e-mailed her “before” and “after” photos of me. The emotional rush was powerful.

But outward appearances and inner satisfactions can be very different. We see people working out every day: jogging in neighborhoods, biking to work, playing basketball on a real

court instead of a game system, heading to gyms instead of couches. And the trend is growing. But who are they inside? Each has their own struggles, but the search is the same: hope.

A wife hopes her spouse will hold her more often if she loses weight. A Soldier hopes to be promoted sooner if he can boast a PT patch for excellent fitness. A slightly older father hopes to draw his teenage son back by keeping up with him in the gym. A lonely soul hopes to muffle the cries inside by making their muscles scream louder than their sadness. We all need hope and we all need some exercise, but physical fitness can only deliver so much hope to change our self-image. Yes, exercise can make us feel better about ourselves, but only when we're in shape. What about when we're 70 and can't stop our bodies from sagging? Or when we're on vacation and don't have the time or place to work out? Being in shape can improve our image only when the one who's looking is looking for outward beauty. But where is God's gaze?

In 1 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul says that physical training has some value, but only spiritual training can benefit us now *and* in the life to come. That's because spiritual training in Christ focuses on the One who created us to be whole, body and soul, and can re-create us to be whole again. Satan wants us to try to polish our image frantically and lose our focus on Christ. Satan would have us be so busy that we forget our Savior and King who makes us more than 'fit' to be with Him forever.

Self-focus is like looking into a mirror: it can't produce any change. It can only bring pride or fear. Instead, we must stare into Jesus' Word that frees us to live by His grace. (James 1:22-25) Seeing who He is can free us from fear or pride and strengthen us for bold service.

Consider ‘image’ in Cain and Abel because of how they perceived God’s approval. Cain presented the work of his hands, but Abel trusted in the sacrifice of another’s life. Each trusted in a type of image and passed this to their generations. Cain’s line became so boastful until their pride was expressed in the 7th generation by murderous entitlement (Genesis 4:21-25). But Seth (whom God gave to Eve after Abel) and his line called on God’s name (Genesis 4:26). Their 7th generation was “Enoch, who walked with God and was no more” (Genesis 5:24). He did not die but went directly to heaven.

Jesus secures our image before God’s gaze. He clothed the naked, healed lepers, cleansed the filthy, forgave the guilty, and changed the wicked. By His grace and power, when the Father looks at us He sees Jesus’ work on our behalf from start to finish. This is why He is called the author and perfecter of our faith Who sat down after His finished work (Hebrews 12:1-2) and why He declared on the cross, “it is finished” (John 19:30). There is nothing we can add to our image! So why do we still try to “air-brush” our lives? Because we’re scared that others are going to see us as we really are. But God already sees all of who we are! He didn’t ask Adam and Eve where they were because He didn’t know! (Genesis 3:9) Jesus didn’t ask “who touched Me” in the crowd out of curiosity! (Luke 8:45) In both situations He was providing an opportunity for them to present themselves to Him – naked, diseased, you name it – and to experience something new. We don’t need a better self-image. We need Christ-image.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T. in Jesus Christ for His view of your image. Look at yourself through His eyes. Talk with the Body of Christ daily about His work of grace that makes us beautiful.

Additional thoughts on 'Image'

Most of us spend some time looking in the mirror – some with pride and some with fear. But God made us exactly the way He wants us: short or tall, big-boned or small-boned, wide hips or no hips, long neck or no neck. These things we can't control, but others we can: our weight, muscle tone, blood pressure, cholesterol, etc. Let's look at ourselves, see what *He* wants us to see, be diligent stewards of what He's given us, trust Him through the process, and praise Him through it all – whether we get exactly what we want or not.

It's true that others look at us, too, and we mustn't completely downplay this. For example, we might reconsider what we wear when we exercise if we are getting others' attention with spandex or skimpy shorts and shirts. We can reserve any flexing and posing for our spouses in private. As a counselor, I can tell you that many inappropriate relationships have begun through physical attractions in the gym. God designed our bodies to be beautiful, and many guys are drawn to nice curves just as many gals are drawn to firm muscles. But our appeal should come from our spirits, not our bodies in skin-tight or skimpy clothing. I write this here because others may not be willing to tell us in the gym - it could seem like a "lose-lose" scenario. Why is that? There are two reasons: all of us should avoid the appearance of flirting, and others may be concerned about appearing jealousy or judgmental.

Paul calls women to dress modestly (1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3-4). And, in my opinion, the same discretion should extend to men - especially in this age that emphasizes physical beauty. One only has to glance at popular magazine covers or prime time TV to see that today's women are commenting on the physical appearance of men now more than ever before.

And even if a person manages to ‘catch’ a good-looking mate, what’ll happen in the relationship when the ‘hottie’ continues to live as they believe, spending lots of time, money, and effort on their looks? How will they feel about each other and themselves in 20 years when wrinkles appear & skin sags?

Physical appearance is such a poor investment. In this life, our bodies will eventually break down. Jesus is more concerned about our spirits right now. Let’s make the long-term investment in an image that will never fade with age.

When I was in college, a bodybuilder walked into our local gym, had his girlfriend oil him up in front of the mirror, turned off all the lights (except for the one over him) and posed for about 10 minutes. He was about 250 lbs of solid muscle, but most of us saw a different image: a self-absorbed man with a single focus on his body. Better than a mirror, our friends and close associates can tell us what image we really reflect. May they see Christ who transforms our lives – inside and out. If you really want to know how others see you, ask your friends how they would describe you to a stranger. Remember that God created us in His image and sent us forth to live in His image over the entire earth. So how we live and how others perceive us is important. Remember what Genesis 4-5 revealed about ‘image’? Cain’s genealogy was known for being rich, playing musical instruments, and forging bronze and iron instruments (Genesis 4:20-22), but Seth’s family line was known for calling on the name of the (Lord Genesis 4:26).

Let’s exercise our relationships in the gym, on our hikes, on the field, and in the food court in such a way that our image honors our Lord and brings joy to the Body of Christ – no matter what our physical accomplishments are - or are not.

INITIATIVE - “Let’s get started!”

Genesis 42:1ff, Exodus 35:20-29, Proverbs 3:28 and 6:6-11,
Matthew 21:28-31, Romans 10:9-15, 2 Corinthians 8:16-17,
Hebrews 3:7-12, James 2:14-19



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

About four months ago, my twelve year old son, Caleb, asked me if we could start exercising together. I was thrilled – and skeptical. The best time for me to exercise is early mornings because I try to keep my evenings and weekends open for maximum time with my family. I was pretty sure that Caleb's biggest challenge would be getting up at 5am.

So, to encourage him to keep coming back, I promised to adjust my workout to his ability. When we jogged together, I wore leg weights and carried dumbbells. When we lifted, we used machines instead of free weights so I could adjust the weight quickly to avoid comparisons of changing big plates. And we agreed to keep the exercise to 30 minutes - enough to push us both and to give him a specific hope in a countdown. But the one challenge we couldn't get around was getting him up. We agreed that I'd nudge and call him gently three times over about 5 minutes and then I'd have to go workout alone.

I was amazed at how well he did for the first few days, and then weeks, and then months! Even when it was freezing and I told him we were running or when he was clearly grumpy because he wanted to sleep in, he got up! Then, after about three months, my wife and I went out of town for week to provide some training at two conferences, and Caleb and his sister stayed with a family next door. When I called the parents to check on Caleb and Hannah a few days later, the man of the house said Caleb had been falling asleep in a chair almost every afternoon. I had suspected he was due to hit another growth spurt, and this confirmed it. When we got back, sure enough, Caleb asked if we could take a break for a while. I was fine with that. He hadn't quit or failed. In fact, he had accomplished one of the simplest and greatest goals that any of us can set. He had taken initiative.

As a counselor, I've spoken with so many people whose greatest challenge seem to be just getting started. Some were afraid they'd fail (as we all do at times), so they had simply chosen not to start. Others were comfortable as they were and saw no reason to change. A family member or boss may have wanted them to change, but they didn't want it for themselves. Either way, they had stagnated right where they were.

When I was doing my research for W.A.I.T. training, some principles in Scripture jumped out at me immediately: 'pain', 'maturity', 'reward' (results), etc. These seem to be obvious elements of growth, but a simple, unimpressive initiative must come first. Isn't that exactly how God calls us? God first told Abram simply to leave his country (Genesis 12:1ff); Moses was to throw his staff down (Exodus 4:1ff); through Elisha He called King Joash just to strike the ground (2 Samuel 13:14-19); He encouraged Jehoshaphat and his army to stand their ground (2 Chronicles 20:15-17); Jesus called the man with a withered hand to stretch out his hand (Matthew 12:10-13); He told servants to fill jars with water (John 2:1ff); He called a crippled man to take up his mat and walk (John 5:2-9); to His disciples, He said "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, etc.); and how many times did He talk about planting 'seeds' - even as unimpressive as a mustard seed?

If you've never seen the movie, "Faith like potatoes", I highly recommend it. Without giving away the story, it's based on a true story about a man who takes an initiative to plant some seeds (literally and figuratively) that made no sense to anyone. He just couldn't remain as he was anymore.

Maybe that's the beauty of initiative. It starts us on a *new* journey. After all, haven't we spent enough time running in

circles of sin? In 1 Peter 1:1-4, the Apostle calls us to step away from our old lives for a new direction. Self-centered fear and pride keep us coming back to the same old stomping grounds of hiding, vengeance, pity parties, and lusts. But if he's trying to motivate us to do something good, why does he start by saying that it's going to hurt? He is just being honest.

As we'll see in the section on 'pain', it always hurts to leave our comfort zones. But we can't mature and experience the rewards of change until we step up and step out. That's why truly good initiatives are more than mechanical motions. They are heart-felt steps sacrificing old loves for a new love. Think about those last few sentences for a minute. Most of us have started some new habit and kept it going for a while but quit later: we got up earlier for Bible reading and prayer, spent regular alone time with our spouse or a certain friend, resisted our sweet tooth, etc. Maybe we didn't see the results quickly enough. Maybe we didn't feel that it was worth all the extra time and effort. Maybe we were just dealing with the symptoms and not the real problem. Probably all of the above.

Most of the time, the bottom-line problem is that we tend to put our self first. But our real hope is in Jesus' love for us, not our deep love for ourselves. Yes, Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as our self, but He's not calling us to put ourselves first. He's saying that we already do that! Now we are to take that level of passion and step out to serve others for His glory.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch for the necessary steps that lead to new journeys, and
Acept that you must take some initiative, but . . .

Invest in the promise of His presence, and . . .

Team with others who are stepping out by faith in the King!

Additional thoughts on 'Initiative'

There are many ways we can take simple initiatives in the gym toward new spiritual journeys. Begin by asking yourself, what could be eventually accomplished through a first step?

If God's Word has convicted you that you are too independent from the Body of Christ, maybe you could step out in faith and ask another believer to exercise with you. Or maybe you know that you need to repent of personal pride. If so, ask others to help you in some area in which they excel and listen to what they have to say. If you do want to cut back on your calories, take a risk and share your goal with a friend and ask for their regular accountability and encouragement.

You can also initiate helping others. Strenuous exercise in the presence of other people stresses our whole being – body and soul. Take a look around the gym or track and field and see whose outer shell is cracking, revealing their anger, fear, sadness, or self-centered joy. Go meet them where they are. Start simply by encouraging them that you see them struggling and are here for them. What might that sound like? Maybe something like this. "I'm glad I'm not the only one struggling here. Do you mind if I exercise beside you? I feel like I can identify with you a little more than some of the others here."

They may be very glad to have someone accept them where they are, or they may get defensive and reject you. But if you can remember that their look of physical struggle on their face is a sign of the spiritual struggle in them, you will be better able to accept either response with grace, compassion, and prayer for them. Who knows, God may bring your small act of kindness to their mind and warm their heart for another opportunity later. All great journeys begin with small steps!

It might be helpful to stick those words “small steps” in your mind. Getting out of bed earlier several days a week may seem like a huge task, but setting out your workout clothes the night before and sitting up in bed on the next morning are little things that can make the key difference. In Romans 10:9-15, Paul speaks of the great goal of others’ faith and salvation, but he back-tracks the process to remind us that it must begin with someone going to bring them the message of the gospel! Let’s not forget that W.A.I.T. training is for relational fitness in the Body of Christ – not simply our personal understanding of Scripture or a better physique. Get out there and initiate talking with others about your Lord as He gives opportunity!

Physical initiative meets spiritual opportunity when we see a friend giving up too early and we walk over and offer to spot them, encourage them for a few more reps, and stick around after they’ve succeeded or failed. That first step away from your old snacking routine can generate all kinds of emotions in your body and soul: “I *need* that snack or I might . . .!” What? Loose my temper later? Not get any sense of reward for what I achieved earlier today? Be too fatigued to give my best later? All these are thoughts of fear: steps on a journey of *self*-confidence. We have to start down the paths of God’s will if we’re going to experience His better provision in His better timing. It will be literally nerve-racking because our bodies’ have gotten used to the foods, activities and even beliefs that change levels of neuro-transmitters affecting our sense of pleasure, pain, energy, rest, etc. Growing pains!

Let’s exercise initiative to walk with Jesus, body and soul. We can’t always see our desired destination from our first steps, but we will never get there without those first steps.

INSTINCT - “To cling or not to cling?”

Proverbs 20:5, Isaiah 30:20-22, Jeremiah 2:23-25, Luke 11:9-13, John 10:27, Galatians 5:16-26, Ephesians 5:28-30, 2 Peter 2:12-13, Jude 10



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Joe Weider was one of the founders of bodybuilding. One of the tenants of his training was the importance of listening to our instincts. He believed that the fundamentals of training for bodybuilding are the same for everyone but that each person is unique in their complex makeup of body-type, metabolism, medical issues, exercise history, etc. So Weider proposed that we experiment with workouts and notice how our unique bodies react to different exercises, forms, routines, etc.

According to Weider, the more we workout, the more we develop an instinct of how to tailor our workouts to our unique needs. This not only made sense to me, Scripture validates the significance of God-given uniqueness (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), the impact of personal history on present maturity (Hebrews 5:12-14), the need for proper form (2 Timothy 2:3-6), the experience of personal benefit (John 7:17), etc.

But Scripture also warns us against simply trusting our gut. “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent.” (1 Corinthians 4:4, New International Version) “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” (Roman 7:21) “There is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Psalm 14:3) In fact, God’s Spirit seems to have been so emphatic about the message of our corrupted instincts in Psalm 14 that He inspired its repetition almost word-for-word in Psalm 53!

So, should I listen to my gut or not? Is my *guilt* or *wisdom* saying “run today” because I’ve neglected my cardio and am currently risking future failure? Is it my *pride* or *mindfulness* that tells me I might get a good return on my investment if I work out extra hard today? Can I trust my gut feelings or not?

Actually, bodily sensations may not be good or evil, but how and why we *respond* are definitely spiritual. Our gut may say to “stay home and take it easy” because we instinctively know that running will bring pain and cost us comforts that we could otherwise enjoy. But God warns us not to follow selfish physical instincts (see Genesis 6:3-12, Jeremiah 17:5-9, Matthew 26:41, Galatians 5:17, 1 Peter 3:18, etc.).

That still doesn’t mean that our *bodies* are bad. After all, God made us as physical creatures in the beginning, and when He comes again He’ll create a new earth with perfect bodies for us (1 Corinthians 15:35-52, Philippians 3:21, Revelation 21:1-5). Yes, our bodies are *being* corrupted by sin (Ephesians 4:22-24), but the problem is not our bodies. The problem comes when we go with our gut instead of our God.

Typically we want to cling to something because we’re scared. Look back at the Soldiers on the giant ladder. All of us cling to something, don’t we? In Galatians 5 and 6, Paul tells us to cling to God’s spirit and not to our fleshly desires. But how do we (in Paul’s words) “walk” or “live” by the Spirit? After all, we can’t see or touch Him.

In my opinion, much of our confusion about walking by the Spirit comes from an unbiblical assumption: because we experience the desires of our flesh as physical leadings to feel better right now, we *assume* that living by His Spirit will be a felt instinct to feel better in Christ right now. Not necessarily.

In fact, many of the most inspiring and rewarding acts of faith are by people who followed God with no ‘warm & fuzzy’ in sight: Abraham in Genesis 17:15ff, Moses in Exodus 3, Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:1-6, Elijah in 1 Kings 19, Jehoshaphat

in 2 Chronicles 20:5-12, all of Jonah, the disciples in Matthew 14:15-17 and John 11:7-16 , the father with partial faith in Mark 9:16-24, Mary and Martha in John 11, Ananias in Acts 9:10-17, Peter in Acts 10:9ff, and, most notably, the Lord Jesus in Mark 15:34, Luke 22:42, Hebrews 5:7-8, etc.

Look closely at Galatians 5:16-26. Paul is not comparing two different *routes* to please ourselves. He is comparing two different *results* based on whom we're trying to please. When we follow the instincts of *our* desires, our flesh will literally work to satisfy itself no matter what the cost to others or even to our selves. But when we live to please *God*, His Spirit supernaturally produces His fruit in us. Look at verses 22-23. Yes, these are wonderful and even enjoyable, but much of the fruit can only be accomplished and experienced in hardship.

Isn't it the difference between infatuation and love? The former seeks self-satisfaction and instinctively knows "that'll make me feel better", so it necessarily listens to the flesh. But love seeks to please another and understands how to do that by getting to know the other person over time. I learn how to please my wife by spending time listening to her and watching her. We learn God's heart by spending time in His Word and watching His work in the Body of Christ, so we rely on His Spirit to warm our hearts to His Word and lead us in Him.

God is not insensitive or an ego-maniac. He simply knows that we must cling to the One who will never let us go. Then we'll climb the ladder of His glory, even when it is hard. Then we'll encourage others to follow even when it's scary. Then we'll focus on the desire of His Spirit and not the desires of our flesh. Then we can go against our natural instincts. What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Additional thoughts on 'Instinct'

Again, the intent of W.A.I.T. training is greater mindfulness in the Body of Christ: slowing down enough to discern our soul and submit our natural instincts to His Word for godly relationships. But to do this, we must be focused.

God re-creates Christians by sending His Spirit to live in us, but our bodies are still being corrupted and damaged by sin. (Ephesians 4:22-24) Therefore, both voices may often feel like competing instincts in us. Choose formats and intensities that help you sense and focus on the images and sensations that come to you – positive, negative, or seemingly indifferent. Find a time and place that's relatively free of distraction (no music or TV, pedestrians or cars to dodge, kids to watch, etc.) and a method that can be self-paced so I can slow down enough to focus on I'm feeling as 'true' and 'good' and then turning my focus to what is actually True and Good for His Body in His Word. For example, I like to exercise at home, early in the morning, on an empty track, or in the gym at low-traffic hours and use machines on which I can quickly adjust the difficulty for more appropriate focus for my body and soul.

Watch for vague feelings, memories or images. The terrible, wonderful and recent will be easier to notice, but you'll need to stay open to identify and deal with subtle signs of pride, fear or confusion. Most of us push these down or project them onto others. First, just be aware of them. God has woven your body and spirit together, so your experiences are literally stored in your brain and nervous system as memories of sights, sounds, touches, smells, and tastes. When these bubble up, God may be calling you to reflect on them. But Satan may also use them to tempt you to defend yourself, blame others, etc. Use God's Word (not your preferences) to guide you.

Accept that these emotions and images are a part of you – not necessarily good or even fully true – but you will not take it to Jesus until you accept that it is really within you. Most of us make two errors with our instincts: sometimes we listen to every feeling and impulsively submit to them without any discretion, and other times we tune out our bodies completely and shut out all of its cries. For example, if you prefer to be introverted, your auto-pilot is probably to *stuff things down within you*. If you prefer extroversion, your auto-pilot is to *act it out on others*. But His way is to *live interdependently* in His Body by His Word. We must be aware of our instincts but answer them in His truth and Spirit. (Galatians 5:13-26)

The instincts of our corrupt and damaged bodies tell us we must respond, or else: “I must eat or I won’t feel anything good! I must sleep or I won’t have the energy to succeed! I must have sex or I won’t know if the other person really loves me! I must exercise or I won’t have people who admire me!”

Look back at those statements. Each is a false *conviction*: ‘felt’ in our flesh, based in a belief, calling us to act in a relationship. So, when are our felt instincts merely biological sensations and when are they convictions from our flesh or from God? Jeremiah 17:9 suggests that it may be impossible to tell. What matters is how we *respond*.

Accepting any negative experiences within us will be difficult. Our sinful instinct is to protect our self by pushing them down, numbing out, blaming others, acting out to alleviate our stress, etc. Submitting to God’s Word and Spirit, however, can lead us to greater openness. Try to verbalize to others what you are sensing within you (or among you), even if the feeling, belief, or image is vague. Our partners can encourage us to go deeper

by saying something like “Can you say more about that?” “I’m here with you - let it come out.” “You’re being very open. I’m listening.” Statements like these can help us feel safe enough to go a little deeper until we discern our actual beliefs and emotions that are fueling our relational M.O.

When we feel safe, our spirit/body will often begin to ‘free-associate’ seemingly unrelated feelings, images, and memories. I suggest that you continue to free-associate until you have a clearer grasp of the specific emotion and related belief: e.g., “I am sad because I believe I am a disappointment to my wife, so I tend to withdraw from her.” “I am afraid that I won’t be able to protect my children.” “I am angry that . . .”

We must not be like those of whom God says, “(your way is like) a restless young camel running here and there, a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust?” (Jeremiah 2:23-24) We see the same concern in Jude 10. Animal-like instincts are self-protective and, therefore, self-destructive to intimacy in Christ.

Once you have an understanding of your underlying beliefs, others may need to help you transition to focus on what it might look like to Invest in Christ. A member of your group could say “This is powerful, and it seems to bother you. What Scripture might address what you are experiencing?” You or they could repeat the Scripture(s) or vividly describe a time when the Lord intervened for you in a similar concern. One of you could also pray aloud for exactly how you need Jesus’ wisdom, peace, boldness, forgiveness, etc.

Team with your group or other believers in your life by living out what you see in God’s Word in the area of concern.

The instincts of our flesh are powerful, and we will need the help of fellow believers to stay close to our Lord. The devil tempts us to do what *we* think is right, but only God's Word is trustworthy. He will reward us for obeying His Word and discipline us for following our instincts instead. Consider the following example as a before and after snapshot of Israel.

Before the Israelites entered the promise land, God reminded them to follow Him alone and promised to bless them if they did so. (Joshua 1:7-9) But after generations of continuing to follow their instincts, Judges 19-21 reveals the disastrous results of doing "what was right in their own eyes". What's the point? We must ground ourselves in God's Word and surround ourselves with fellow faithful believers.

We tend to defend against pain by focusing on intellectual issues or superficial facts instead of genuine relationships. So, consider meeting with members of your exercise group for additional times of meditation on Scripture and prayer. You can share your convictions, changes, resistance to change, what is being most helpful, etc. If you want to grow, you'll have to take some risks. Telling others about the depths of our souls will be difficult. Listening to theirs can be, too. But James 5:16 tell us that such love can be healing.

Again, we'd rather 'fix it' or shape others into our image instead of disciple them in Jesus' image and follow-up for genuine relationships under Christ: calling them on the phone, inviting them to our homes, befriending them on a social network, going to functions together at church, school, or sports. It takes time and teams to renew our minds against old instincts. See Romans 12:1-3ff for more on the subject. What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

MATURITY – “Measure your progress”

Deuteronomy 8, Proverbs 20:29, Ecclesiastes 12, Matthew 18:1-5, Luke 8:14, John 15, Galatians 6:1-5, Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 4:12, Hebrews 5:11-14



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

The word ‘maturity’ is used in so many different contexts in American society that it’s almost lost any meaning at all. When a film or TV show is “for mature audiences only”, it usually means there will be scenes of intense violence, sexual content, profanity, or all of the above. If a teenage girl says that a boy is “so mature” it may be because she likes his confidence or responsible behavior. And in some circles, the elderly prefer to be called “mature citizens”. So what is it?

In physical fitness, maturity is usually a measurement of growth that considers natural ability, personal effort, age and experience. Our ability to run faster, lift more and last longer can increase well into our thirties. And when we’re consistent and diligent to exercise, our experience makes us wiser for more efficient and effective growth. But at a point, regardless of our natural ability, effort or experience, we crest that hill and start a downhill slide to the other side, working even harder just to keep what we’ve got. But just when our minds are maturing (hopefully), our bodies are getting weaker - one of God’s reminders that we are not to hope in this world. Dictionary.com defines maturity as 1) the state of being ripe: *The fruit will be mature soon* or 2) fully developed; perfected: *mature judgment; to bring a plan to maturity*. God’s Word uses both of these definitions to describe the growth in Him.

In John 15, Jesus describes us as God’s fruit that must remain to Him to grow for His use and enjoyment. Maturity is a measure of where we are in the process. Let’s look at a few others passages to see how God measures maturity.

In Luke 8:14, Jesus implies that we’re to grow as fruit for *God’s* pleasure, not for the pleasure of self or others. If I believe that my maturity is for myself or others, I can quickly

become angry or depressed when my older body brings me more pain and less pleasure. If I focus just on my body or others' value of my body, I may even quit. But if I focus on Jesus' purpose to grow me in His image for His pleasure, then I am encouraged to live for Him. (Jeremiah 9:23-24, 29:11-14)

In 1 Corinthians 2:6 and 14:20, Paul says that the mark of maturity is hearing and obeying God's will. Worldly wisdom trusts in self toward our own goals. God's wisdom listens to Jesus and serves others for His glory. But we need Jesus' help to humble ourselves and serve others in the gym, at work, and in other relationships. So, quick repentance and following through on God's will is a measure of maturity in Christ.

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul's uses the term to convey the general character in Christ and our unity of faith in Him. This speaks to me on two levels. I spend a lot of time 'maturing' my projects - admin and logistics at work, household chores, lesson plans, books and programs about the Lord Jesus. But I'm not always as intentional to exercise my spiritual maturity. It's the difference between sitting in my office writing *about* Him and getting on my knees *with* Him in order to get out and live *in* Him for the mutual maturity of His Body, the Church.

In Philippians 3:13-15, Paul reminds us that maturity is an ongoing process. It's possible to stagnate and slide backward, so God's Word must be our constant focus. Just prior to these verses, Paul had listed many of his personal achievements that he later considered wasted time. After sensing so many of my own shortcomings, I am encouraged to hear that God does not give up on the immature. How foreign this is to our way!

Many of us have heard words of Isaiah 55:8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways’, saith the Lord.” But do you know the context? God is describing His heart of forgiveness. When others sin against *us, our* thoughts and ways are to seek revenge or give up on them. Not Jesus. He seeks His people and never gives up.

In Colossians 4:12 Paul encourages us to work for others’ maturity, too. And the writer of Hebrews warns us that this is not automatic or easy (Hebrews 5:14). We could go on and on. In fact, Scripture from Genesis to Revelation is a running commentary on God forming a people for Himself.

Most of us know when literal fruit is mature and for what purpose. If God calls us His fruit how should we hear that? For what are we to be used? Moses knew God face-to-face (Deuteronomy 34:10); David who was a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14); Timothy who was more concerned for Jesus’ interests than his own (Philippians 2:20ff).

They were a sweet fragrance to God and a source of strength to others. How about us? How can we grow from where we are toward His picture of maturity?

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.
Watch God’s wonderful & warped creation of ‘fruits’.
Accept what you see as a call to mature but
Invest in your growth according to His Word. And
Team with other believers. Even Paul said “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12)

Additional thoughts on 'Maturity'

Every exercise program and relationship should be monitored regularly for growth toward maturity. Many athletes write down general goals and measurable performance objectives for reference points to check their progress toward physical fitness. You can use these and other methods to check your spiritual and relational growth through W.A.I.T. training.

Maybe you want to feel more peace or take more initiative in relationships. Write down these goals and list some specific contexts, times of the day, associated fearful or proud beliefs, and choose exercises that remind you of your goals so you can format your workout to meditate on and express your godly objectives. Then share your goals with your partners so they can recommend options, encourage you, hold you accountable, and give you their perspective on your progress during the workout. But remember - you'll need to remain open.

Measuring growth (ours or theirs) can be exciting & stressful, depending on the individual's level of physical and spiritual fitness. Because we will always struggle with fear and pride, we must always go back to God's Word to see how *He* defines maturity. And, while it's true that our partners should remind us of Jesus' Word, we must constantly guard against becoming defensive or attacking them. Paul reminds us of the common temptation to compare ourselves to each other, even when we're trying to help each other grow. (Galatians 6:1-5)

You can use the other 23 principles of W.A.I.T. training and your own studies of Scripture to identify other specific goals for relational growth. The key is to seek *God's* desires, not necessarily ours, our families, our boss', or our culture's. To what will Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?

When you begin to feel the temptation to compare yourself to others, reread the section on ‘genes’. God made you unique, so He doesn’t call you to measure yourself against anyone else. Go to Him for wisdom and grace to do your best with what He has given you, and then make progress from wherever you are.

Use specific exercises to express your goals. For example, one of my goals is to be less of a Lone Ranger and to be joyfully interdependent in the Body of Christ. So when I do curls, I deliberately watch how my arms, shoulders, hands, and even my back need each other. Then I meditate on 1 Corinthians 12 and how parts of Jesus’ Body need each other. And, finally, I ask God to help me to be interdependent with others to function as a whole Body. Move your body in ways that express God’s Word and His goals for you.

You could even turn your written goals into a prayer/praise journal to track your growth. For example, after you write down your relational goals and the exercises you choose to illustrate your goals, record how long you exercised, the speed or intensity at which you performed the exercises but most importantly, record your emotions, beliefs, and how you related to others during the exercises. Over the weeks, look for patterns in your emotions, beliefs and how you related. According to God’s Word, are you maturing, stagnating, or regressing? Ask your partners for their observations.

Evaluate your maturity by measuring changes in relationships outside of the gym: your willingness to examine your soul, to commit to God’s Word and express His truth through your actions, to be vulnerable with fellow believers, and to be patient and long-suffering in your difficult relationships.

One simple method with your group is to use a scaling system. The Army often uses a “green, amber, red” scale, and you can do that, too. I like using a scale of negative and positive numbers, such as -5 to +5. Numbers may seem safer because they are vague concepts but negatives and positives can convey powerful pictures, so the combination has the potential for broad applications. For example, you could name a negative number to express sadness, lack of energy, feelings of loneliness, numbness, etc. And positive numbers could be used to convey excitement, hyperactivity, a sense of connection with others, assertiveness, etc.

Ask your partner “Where are you *right now* on a scale of -5 to +5” and “what is that like for you?” They may share their conviction (a sense of feeling ‘bad, mad, sad or glad’) quickly and clearly, or they might not be able or willing yet. But their bodily disposition will tell you a lot. Are they postured to hide or cover up? That could indicate a felt belief that they are ‘bad’ (guilty and fearful). Are they postured to attack – even with their squinted eyes or slightly clenched fingers? These may indicate a felt belief that they deserve something that they aren’t getting and are ‘mad’ about it. Does their bodily posture suggest low energy? Is their face down to break eye contact, or are they physically distancing from you or others? These can be signs that they are ‘sad’, believing that they have lost (or may be losing) something important to them. Are they all smiles or energetic to ‘keep the ball rolling’? These may indicate that they are ‘glad’ and believe that things will be good if they continue as it. But remember - just because you or a partner *feels* something that doesn’t necessarily mean the belief is *true*. Help them begin to compare their present belief to *God’s commands and promises*.

Tell them what you see and say something like “Your body language suggests that you may be (mad, sad, etc.)” and (depending on the trust between you and their knowledge of God’s Word). You could ask them to name their emotion and offer to read an encouraging passage of Scripture to them.

Ask them “how might we adjust the way we’re exercising together to help you move from _____ just one notch in the direction that God wants you to grow?” And later in the workout (especially at the end), recheck the numbers and ask what you both did to help (or hinder) maturity.

As you can imagine, God may use this type of workout to spark the interest of others around you. Someone will notice that your routine isn’t “normal” and ask about your group. What an opportunity to tell them how you’re working toward maturity as a whole person! You could offer them a copy of the book, meet with them to discuss it, and workout with them.

We can only pursue true fitness by knowing God’s Word and applying our faith in relationships. Sitting in a church once a week for religion is not an effective exercise for godliness. Help each other focus on *Jesus’* work as our hope for maturity.

As we read in John 15, we can only bear fruit by remaining in Him. It’s impossible and foolish to hope to bear fruit *first* to earn the right to become part of the vine. That’s backwards! As branches, we *will* bear fruit when we live in the Vine! John 15:2 reminds us that He also prunes us to bring about growth, taking away the dead parts of our lives so we will pour ourselves into only what He has given us. You can also review Matthew 13:8 and 2 Peter 1:3-10 for God’s intent for maturity and Luke 13:6-9 for encouragement.

PAIN – “Departing the comfort zone!”

Genesis 3:15-19 & 32:22-32, Proverbs 23:31-35, Jeremiah 4:19, Mark 3:27 (& Acts 19:13-16), Romans 5:3-7, 1 Corinthians 12:26, 2 Timothy 2:3-5, Hebrews 12:4ff, 1 Peter 4:1-4, Revelation 21:4



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Take a look at these Soldiers going through Taser training. They may have more confidence and greater compassion to use a Taser as necessary, but “Wow!!” Couldn’t they just take that class online?! Unfortunately, no. We can maintain a level of *physical* fitness without much pain, but our *spirits* can’t really learn or change without pushing through it. Let’s consider some lessons from muscular pain first. Then we’ll look at God’s purposes for relational pain in Christ.

Obviously, not all types of pain lead to spiritual growth. For example, we know that the burn we get during a good workout doesn’t necessarily produce lasting results and that sharp pain is usually a bad sign. But that dull ache we get in our muscles after we’ve pushed and kept pushing beyond our comfort zones – that’s different! Most fitness enthusiasts actually look forward to that sensation as ‘growing pains’. The hurt can be so intense that we can hardly move 24-72 hours later, but after we’ve healed and go back (if we go back) we can bear the same load and with much less muscular pain.

Scientists used to say that type of pain was due to a build-up of lactic acid, but now we know that our bodies remove that acid in about an hour. The new theory is that micro-lacerations (tiny tears) in our connective tissue are the source, but they’re not really sure. And the purpose of pain perplexes scientists even more: they agree that pain warns us, but they also agree that we can *benefit* by pushing *through* it. They’re confused because these two observations conflict with the theory of evolution, which is embraced by most scientists.

Evolution would have us believe that we evolved because our body’s design helped us advance to this point. But our body’s *natural* designed response to pain is to stop in our

tracks or even move backwards! Pain might warn us not to play with fire again, but it doesn't inspire our bodies to push *through* it - especially if we know it will still hurt to do so!

Genesis 3:16-19 seems to say that God gave pain to mark the felt threshold or "boundary" of physical comfort in this world. In other words, if our goal is physical peace in this world, we only have to do whatever it takes to avoid pain. But if we are pursuing *God*, pain is THE good sign that we are leaving our comfort zones of physical pleasure, strength, and safety in this world and, therefore, are to "keep pushing!!"

Remember, Adam and Eve were tempted to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by their desire to please their flesh: the fruit *looked* good and *tasted* good. The lure was so powerful that they opted to decide what is 'good' or 'evil' on their own, even at the expense of eternal life with God. So God gave us the sign of growing pains: again, if we want *this* world all we have to do is go with the flow, but if we want *His* kingdom we must push past our comfort zones here.

Notice that Genesis 3 records God's discipline in the same three areas in which He calls us to serve. To "be fruitful and multiply", women must now push through pain (v 16a). To "subdue the world", husbands and wives must push through the painful process of leadership (v 16b). And to "dress" עָבַד and "keep" שָׁמַר the Garden (verbs appearing together only 14 times in the Old Testament, connoting a priestly process of preparing and guarding something for worship), our 'fruit' must come by our blood, sweat and tears (v 17-19).

So, is God some kind of Sadist who can only feel better by making you and me feel worse? You gym rats out there – are

you ‘sickos’ for making your workout partner push through their pain? Of course not! You know that clinging to physical comforts actually works against all of us. Have you noticed that the most physically successful countries in the world eventually become the least healthy? They please themselves to death! But God cares too much to let us be at ease here. Consider the following thoughts on growing through pain.

- Pain forces most of us to slow down (or stop) and re-evaluate, “Is this pain a sign of *growth* or did I *hurt* something or someone unnecessarily?”
- Pain warns us, “If you do that again, it’s going to hurt again!” Heed these warnings and prepare accordingly! Spiritual pain, for example, warns us to read His Word, pray, live our faith, and ask for help.
- If we rarely experience pain, we’re probably working in the limits of our strength and safety, loving our comfort instead.
- Pain usually comes where the ‘parts of the Body’ connect. Ephesians 4:16 says to care for the connections in His Body.
- Pain can be lessened by increasing blood-flow to the muscle (stretches, massage, hot bath, sauna etc.). If your knowledge of His blood comforts you, remind other believers, too!
- Pushing through pain builds endurance. Genesis 3:15 says Satan will “bruise” Jesus and His people, so we must *endure*!

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T. Watch against clinging to comfort. Acept your weakness as realities and Invest in Jesus’ call to push forward as He directs, despite the pain. And Team with His people! He will honor your work in His strength (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

Additional thoughts on ‘Pain’

When we think of God as a type of ‘Super Wal-Mart’ to give us whatever we want whenever we want it, it doesn’t seem godly to push for pain in our body or in our others’. Yet, His love requires the members of Christ’s Body must accept pain and push others out of their comfort zones, too. Philippians 2:12 reminds us that the painful reality of spiritual growth is that each of us must “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” Did Paul just say ‘workout’? I realize he’s probably not talking about exercise here, but it’s interesting that he wrote about *pain* in relationships.

Watch your body in the mirror or watch a partner at the point of exhaustion when faces start to contort, especially the eyes and mouth. God designed these areas of the face with small, sensitive muscles, so these will be the first to reveal our spirits when our bodily strength fades. You may see guilt, anger, sadness or even joy. Remember, our emotions are bodily expressions of relational beliefs. In other words, our physical pain will say something about our current spirit.

We may believe “I’m not strong enough, and it’s not fair that my life (boss, spouse, God, etc.) doesn’t give me time to get stronger!” We may be scared. “I’m supposed to be a dedicated Christian and professional but I’m not in good shape! What will others think of me?” We may be depressed. “I have so much pain in my life. Why can’t God bless me just this once and take some of the pain away?!” Or we could rejoice that we’re fighting for growth through the pain!

Accept the pain that you see in them (or are experiencing in yourself) and talk about it, but be mindful of relational safety, too. There are pros and cons to talking with others about any

kind of pain in the moment of suffering – especially relational pain before God. And, of course, there are physical concerns, too. The person might be holding a heavy rack of steel over their head or running with you near traffic!

Make *brief* comments to let them know that you see their pain, and offer gracious reminders that you are there for them. “I know it burns. I’m here for you” may be enough in the heat of the moment, but follow up with them later as appropriate.

Invest in Christ by talking more deeply with each other before or after the workout. If you’ve seen a pattern in their pain, you could gently say “I’ve noticed that whenever you really push it and start to hurt, you tell us not to spot you. But then you reach muscle-failure, need help, and get up with clenched fists pacing around looking down and mumbling something to yourself. What is that?” Listen carefully to their heart.

Your partners may be evasive or may not even know *how* to identify their struggle. You can ask them to recall some of the Scriptures they chose for memorization and meditation. They may have chosen the passages because the verses remind them of specific hopes or fears for their life. And the pain (because it is a physical reminder that we don’t have what it takes to go further) may be cueing their guilt, anger, or sadness that they don’t have strength to handle ‘heavy loads’ at home, stamina to ward off emotional pain in relationships, image to secure your approval, etc. Remember, emotions are physical manifestations of our spiritual beliefs! I like the King James Version’s translation of ‘patience’ in Galatians 5:22 – ‘longsuffering’. Be willing to suffer with your partner in pain as long as it takes. True Christian love in His Body is most clear and convincing when it endures through the suffering.

Team with them by encouraging each other to push through the pain. “God has put more inside you!” or “Yes, it hurts! Growth hurts! You can’t grow if you stop now!” or “It’s burning now, but Jesus will grow you through the pain – IF you keep going!” You get the idea. Love them enough to *work* with them, and accept the same from them as love, too.

You can also partner with them by “bearing a little of their burden” (Galatians 6:1-5) in spotting them. “I’ve got about 2 lbs of your barbell in my hands, so give us 2 more reps!” Or if you’re running/hiking together come up beside them and put your hand lightly on their upper back – just enough to encourage them. Two cautions: 1) first, *ask* if it’s okay to touch them. People who have been physically abused may perceive *any* uninvited touch as a strong cue of danger. We don’t want our intended help to do more harm than good. And 2) don’t push – just touch lightly. We don’t want to knock them off-balance, especially if they’re close to exhaustion.

There are many other ways and opportunities to help each other push through the pain. But remember that the goal is not growth for growth’s sake. Focus on Jesus’ specific commands and promises. In what does *He* call us to grow? The other 23 principles in W.A.I.T. training can provide several ideas.

As you might expect, muscle failure and fatigue are not the only moments of pain when our spirits peak through. Watch yourself and your buddies for those moments of even slight ‘pains’ of difficult emotions: hunger, loneliness, boredom, illness, injuries, etc. All of these can be kinks in our armor, revealing the inner pain of our beliefs (whether these beliefs are true or false).

For example, when we are irritated, (“I’m not getting what I deserve”), worried (“I’m not sure that I’m going to get what I need”), afraid (“I lost something that I need”), embarrassed (“I have been exposed”), regretful (“I should have done better”), or startled (“I wasn’t prepared”). We may feel a knot in our gut, a tight neck, pounding head, aching joints, and withdraw from others, attack them, or find some way to numb the pain. But when we pacify spiritual pain with food, music, sleep, sex, busywork, or even exercise, we are disabling God’s alarm system of mindfulness to take appropriate action in His Body!

Examine Ephesians 4:19 in context. Instead of avoiding these moments, help each other slow down to notice them. Look for emotions in our body language but always compare what you notice to the truth of God’s Word. You might discover that the bodily experience is part of God’s call to confess your need for Christ, grieve appropriately, ask for other believers’ help, rest in Him, and move forward in the power of His grace.

When we step beyond our empty idolatry of self-reliance into the reality of “I can’t handle this!”, our spirits will begin to reveal our hopes, guilt, anger, and sadness. But these painful moments are some of the best opportunities to grow in the peace of Jesus Christ. As I suggested earlier, physical pain may be *the* threshold between the comfort zones of our own power, safety, and pleasure and truly following Christ.

Even though I know the truth of these principles, it is still difficult for me to accept that physical pain (fatigue, hunger, aches, etc.) can be a good opportunity. But unless I accept the pain (as opposed to avoiding it) I cannot repent of the idols to which I usually turn for comfort. I cannot enjoy what God will provide beyond the pain if I always avoid the pain.

PARTNERS – “We need each other”

Exodus 18:8-27, Proverbs 27:17, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Romans 12:3-13, 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 and 12:12-27, Galatians 6:2-5



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

All athletes, regardless of their sport, know the value of partners. Even if we're into individual sports like downhill skiing, marathons, tennis, etc., we need others to coach us, to encourage us, and to hold us accountable. Indeed, one of the reasons so many of us struggle with being consistent in our training and exercise routines is the lack of a partner. They may not be able to help us every day in every way, but it makes a big difference when they are there.

Let's use this analogy of sports (as Paul often did) as we think of God's relationship to His people. For example, in many ways, Jesus acts as our personal trainer and agent. He gives us direction, pushes and supports us, and represents us. But He is also the Owner of our team. We owe Him and fellow Christians our best because we belong to Him (Romans 13:8). But we don't always play well with others, do we?

In 1994, with 1.8 seconds left in the third game of the NBA Eastern Conference semifinals, the Chicago Bulls and the NY Knicks were tied 102-102. Coach Phil Jackson called a timeout to give his team the last play. Rookie Toni Kukoc had been playing a great game, so Jackson told the team to get the ball to Kukoc. But Scotty Pippen (who was also one of their best) became so angry that he refused to play. What happened? Jackson benched Pippen; Kukoc made the shot; and the Bulls won the game. But let's not judge Pippen too quickly. Haven't most of us been ball-hogs in some key play?

What can we learn from Pippen's poor choice? First, none of us can act like a free agent on God's team. Second, God will always win, whether we decide to play or not. And third, the rebel only misses out on the glory of the team's victory. Remember Mordecai's counsel to his niece in Esther 4:11-14?

Even so, such an emphasis on working with others often seems to go against the Western values of independence, the Maverick spirit, climbing the ladder of success, being #1, etc. For this very reason, my wife and I chose Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 as the text for our wedding service. We want to focus on *interdependence* in Christ, not independence. Both of us grew up in families that produced go-getters, but looking back, we wish we had been closer in our families. My parents were business partners in a family lake resort, so as my brothers and I grew older they gave us more responsibilities and input on how to run the business. I am eternally grateful for their great witness of integrity, commitment, and service because of their love for Christ. But the busyness of our business kept us from knowing each other more intimately.

Yes, we did partner to work shifts. Each parent managed the store, apartments, etc. while my brother and I worked the gas dock, fishing pier, boating area, etc. But there was just too much work for all of us to spend time together, and we didn't have the money to hire other workers consistently. Again, I am grateful that God used my parents' example and encouragement to develop a great work ethic and spirit of individual initiative in me and my brothers. But I have also struggled to learn how to be more interdependent and intimate.

One of my pet peeves from our family business is still issues of responsibility. I want to know my responsibility and the other person's so I figure out how to 'succeed' (or blame when I don't succeed). But Galatians 6:1-5 gives us God's perspective on teamwork. First, Paul reminds us that our 'business' is the growth of all believers in our relationship in His Body. Again, contrary to many cultural values, we are not called as individuals to stand out as better than other believers.

And we're certainly not to ignore others needs or climb over them to get what we want. But I get tired of helping others who should be doing better, don't you? So, knowing that we're tempted to personal pride and complaining, Paul writes begins the passage with the words, "ye which are spiritual (i.e., not more concerned in pleasing their own fleshly desires) restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

What is my responsibility and what is theirs? The answer is in Paul's reference to "burdens" in verse 2 and verse 5. The first term is βάρος (baros) in Greek (the original language of the New Testament). It pictures a weight, usually heavier than one can bear. The second term, φορτίον (phortion), is where we get our word "portion". It refers to the inventory of an individual's task, like a Soldier's rucksack with a specific inventory of items for which they are responsible to carry into war. Jesus calls each of us to help others when they are overwhelmed *and* to carry what He has given us individually.

As we noted in the section on "genes", God created each of His children with unique abilities and even different measures of faith. He expects each of us to carry our load and to work together bearing each other's burdens. When and where do you need help? How might He call us to help someone or ask for help when one of us is buckled under too much weight?

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T. Watch God's creation for individual loads and excessive burdens. Accept what He has given us and the goodness of partnering, but Invest in partners as He directs in His Word. Only He is reliable, but He calls us to experience and express His love in His Team. Faith in Jesus Christ is a team sport!

Additional thoughts on 'Partners'

In every area of our lives, we need partners: someone to coach us, encourage, assist, confront, and commit. W.A.I.T. training is designed to use different formats of physical fitness, but the deeper goal is genuine relationships in Christ.

If you're still reading this book by yourself, begin assessing your specific interests or needs in exercise and pray that God would lead you to other believers. And keep an open heart – the Lord might lead you to someone who wants to work out with you but not necessarily in your comfort zone. When you've identified a few potential partners, give them a copy of the book and ask them about forming a group. Pray and stay sensitive to what seems to make the group unique. Should the group incorporate prayer before, during or after exercise?

Will they benefit more from exercise to spark discussion, to memorize verses, as an opportunity for encouragement and accountability, or something else? Should you use a format of weights? Swimming? Running? Talk as a group so everyone can discuss what's best for the group.

While you're exercising together, take the initiative and ask your group for their thoughts on what they've been reading. Listen openly without responding too quickly. Remember that even God has 'partners': Father, Son, and Spirit! So, He tells the members of His Body to work together and promises to bless interdependence under Him (Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:12ff, Ephesians 3:6, Colossians 3:15, etc.). Guard against mere intellectual discussions that keep you from your hearts, "prayer" time that is actually gossip, mechanical formulas for 'success' that lead to pride instead of praise, bashing other denominations or religions instead of focusing on Him. Keep it about your relationships in His Body, the Church.

Watch your partners and voice what you see. But give them what they need to grow, not just what makes you comfortable. If you enjoy *encouraging* others, you could have difficulty holding them *accountable* for cheating, neglecting some areas, boasting in their strength, going through the motions without spiritual reflection, etc. If you're a Mr./Ms. "fix-it" and focus on the problem to bring a solution, encouragement may not come naturally to you but they still need it. Love them by reminding them of God's promises. If they're having trouble choosing Scriptures to renew their minds, offer passages that have built your faith - but let them choose.

There will be times when they may need you to take charge of exercises, Scripture reading, meditations and prayer, etc. And there will be times when you will need to be quieter and listen to the Lord work on you through them. Stay open to what each one brings to the group. Otherwise, your stubbornness will enslave you to think what you've always thought, feel what you've always felt, and do what you've always done.

Do what it takes to make the time truly relational. After all, being in loving relationships in Christ is why God created us in the first place. How fast can you run 4 miles? How far can you march with a loaded rucksack on your back? How hopeful are you that you can persevere? To a great extent, your answers will depend on whether you have partners to help you through. They can make a big difference.

Our greatest partner, of course, is Jesus. Proverbs 18:24 says there is one who sticks closer than a brother. The One for whom we work works inside us, beside us, before us, around us and behind us to profit our labor in Him. (1 Corinthians 3:6-9) Praise God for Jesus and His Body!

REST - “Chill out now or burn out later!”

1 Kings 19:1-18 (especially vs 5-9), Exodus 17:8-13, Psalm 121:3-4 and 127:1-2, Isaiah 40:26-31, Matthew 11:28-30, Hebrew 4:7-10



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

I thank God for helping me find the picture for this section. Can you tell where this guy is sleeping? It's a gym! What a great reminder that we need more than hard work to grow.

Generally, we experience our need for physical rest after a hard day's work in which we've given our all. So we look forward to even a temporary reprieve from the burdens of the day. So often, however, even the best physical rest isn't enough. Have you ever started the day invigorated by a good night's sleep, but your early morning energy was quickly overshadowed by depressing tasks and difficult people? Still, we must learn to chill out or we will burn out. But how?

The answer comes in looking *back* for our *spiritual* rest. The early church seems to have changed the day of Sabbath rest from the last day of the week to the first (Acts 20:7 & 1 Corinthians 16:2) to be a regular reminder that Jesus' work has already accomplished our peace. Let's think about that.

Jesus gives us lasting rest from the weights that we have tried to carry on our own. For example, His work on the cross covered all of our sins – past, present and future (Hebrews 4:1-11); He initiates and follows through with every part of believers' lives (Romans 8:28-30 and Ephesians 2:1-10); and His love, wisdom, and power are the same for us yesterday, today and forever! (Hebrews 13:8 and Revelation 1:8) We can rest in Him when we understand and accept that *He* has established our worth, purpose and security *in our stead!*

Augustine, one of the early church fathers, wisely said that “God has made us for Himself, and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Him.” Think about that. His statement reminds us that our sense of physical exhaustion is often from

spiritual fear. Think about the physical impacts on us when we worry. If I sit up in bed early in the morning and go into panic-mode that “I don’t have what it takes to make it today!” my energy begins to drain almost immediately. Moms, what is it like for you to crave a short nap while your kids are at school because you’ve been working so hard at home, but there’s just too much to do and no one seems to notice or care? Many of us grow even wearier because we seek spiritual rest by physical means - naps, music, food, etc. – and find that these do not satisfy. Consider one of my own battles.

In February 2003, my unit’s convoy crossed into Iraq and drove for 72 hours before we got to our tactical assembly area. Since Chaplains are not allowed to carry weapons, I had been driving the entire time to free my Assistant to watch the horizon with his M16. I was only able to get about 2-3 hours of sleep each night. My 6’ 3” body couldn’t rest in our vehicle packed with sand-bags and loads of gear. And, on top of that, I was also worried about being unarmed in combat.

As soon as we arrived, all I could think about was sleep, but the area was still not secure. Even our Apache pilots had flown in 14 hours prior with no ground security at all – I can’t imagine how tired they were! Obviously, that wasn’t the plan, but our intelligence analysts hadn’t anticipated our Brigade Combat Teams meeting so much resistance on the routes ahead of us. I can’t ever remember needing sleep that badly. After we assessed the local threat as minimal and posted the first shift of guards on our perimeter, the rest of us could relax for the first time in 3 days. I was dirty and hungry, but I was safe. It was the most powerful sleep I have ever enjoyed, even knowing that the next day would present a whole new set of hardships and fears.

All of us need a sense of security in order to rest. My wife, for example, sleeps much better when I am at home. Some people sleep facing the door to their rooms, especially when they're alone. Children sometimes sleep with "woobies" and "teddies" because those things help them feel loved. No padlock, however, can keep out all prowlers. And no guard can protect us from our own guilt. We need security in Christ.

Psalm 121:1-3 and Psalm 127:1-2 call us to trust God to do what only *He* can do. Only then will we find the confidence and energy to do what He has called *us* to do. Guards can fall asleep on duty, and a simple class 3 fluid leak can deadline a multi-million dollar weapons system. Look back at Jesus' work! He died to secure our status before the Father and proved His trustworthiness by His life and resurrection! We can rest knowing He is our Savior and King, day or night.

And there is one rest for which believers are still to look forward. Jesus is coming back to for us. The One who died to save our souls is coming back to perfect us, body and soul, so we can live with Him in Paradise forever. (Isaiah 65:17-25, Hebrews 4:6-12, 2 Peter 3:8-16) Again, God created us body and soul. And He will save us completely, body and soul.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.
Watch His creation, wonderful, warped, and wounded. What do you notice about the *need* for rest and the *goodness* of rest?
Accept what you see as a personal message to you, and . . .
Invest in Christ's Kingdom. You have to sleep, but He never does. He watches over us always (Psalm 121:3-4) so our spirits can rest in His power, wisdom, and goodness.
Team with other believers who will remind you of the goodness of depending on Him always.

Additional thoughts on 'Rest'

Science tells us that we must rest, but only our bodies can tell you how much – usually a day or two after we've exercised. If you feel that you could've done more, maybe you should do a little more next time. But if you need to rest (sleep, alone time, a pause in the action, etc.) then take the rest that you need. 1 Kings 19 and Mark 6:31 reveal that God allows and even encourages rest to renew His people.

So how can we know if we're doing too much? If your heart rate exceeds 80% of your max (depending on your fitness level) you might need to ease off a little. Growth requires us to push ourselves, but pushing too hard can be dangerous. Watch the soreness in your muscles, too. A dull ache can be normal, but sharp pains associated with specific movements are often the sign of a pulled muscle, strained ligament or worse. Listen to your body, and go to God's Word for guidance. Talk to a doctor if the pain hinders daily function.

Do not compare your strength, energy level or need for rest to others. Scripture tells us to work within the measure of faith given to us, implying that some have more or less. Even God doesn't compare us to others – only to our own potential (see Romans 14:1-4ff). This biblical perspective can also help you not to be so hard on others who might need to rest.

Ask your workout group to watch each other for proper rest. Some members will tend toward too much rest while others will tend not to rest enough. You can usually judge the individual's need by their ability to perform over time. If their strength and stamina (or yours) seem to decrease unusually quickly, their current fitness levels may require more rest.

If strength and stamina are always good, they may be resting too much during the workout. But let's resist 'diagnosing' each other. Genetics, personal motivation, diet, etc. influence fitness, too. Ironically (if those things are okay), the less we push ourselves the more we tire. Over time, if we push ourselves wisely we'll have more energy and need less rest.

Help each other balance work and rest. Try alternating muscle groups for work and rest, such as "push-pull" routines, circuit training, or alternating calisthenics (sprints, jogging backward, 'grapevines', jumping jacks, jump rope to picture that you can still make progress while resting. You may be mentally tired when you come home from work but rest your mind while helping your spouse with simple tasks around the house. But talk with them first. Some tasks can't be done while you're mentally checked out. You may be exhausted in almost every way and can only lie down beside a loved one and hold their hand, take a leisurely car ride, or watch a family-oriented movie while sharing popcorn, but you can do *something*.

In the fourth Commandment, God is not ordering us to do nothing on the Sabbath. He is calling us to rest in Him because He has proven that He is the One who meets our needs. (Exodus 16:12-30) We don't have to work ourselves to death to maintain our security. Rest in Christ's work.

If you're embarrassed to run a little slower, pause a little longer, or get a little more sleep, you may need to repent of pride or fear. You can also use that time to praise Him that He loves you because of Jesus' work – not yours. Praise Him that He keeps you when you sleep and can't help yourself. (Psalm 127) He will even use you to bless others *because* of your weakness. (1 Corinthians 1:20-31)

REWARD – “Keep your eyes on the Prize”

Genesis 15:1, Ecclesiastes 9:11, 1 Corinthians 9:24,
Philippians 3:12-16, 1 Timothy 4:7-8, 2 Timothy 4:7-8



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

What rewards are you enjoying? What results are you pursuing? I ask because the type of rewards (results) that we seek directly influences our approach to fitness – physically or spiritually. In physical pursuits we usually work to become (or remain) attractive, to feel better, or to prolong our lives. But not one of these can be secured through physical means, but all of them can be secured through Christ. Think about it. Again, it's the difference between fear and love. When I don't know His love I will work to find fulfillment out of my spirit of fear and emptiness – ironically, a position of weakness.

As I write this, I am almost 50. I've accomplished some of my physical goals over the years, but most I have not. Many times I haven't had the work schedule, energy, or desire to remain steadfast. And even those goals I have accomplished are now harder to maintain. My metabolism is slower; my joints are weaker; it takes more work to achieve the same results; and, if I miss a day or two, the results slip away more quickly. Not very rewarding, huh? I didn't plan it that way, but it causes me to wonder, "Am I investing my time well?"

God's Word tells us to invest in Jesus. But why? I mean, let's be real. He doesn't physically hold me when I feel alone. I don't always feel the comfort of His promises or goodness of His commands. He hasn't spared me physical difficulties. In fact, He's promised I'll have more pain! (John 15:18-21) I often worry about those who look to a false gospel of health, wealth and prosperity. Let's look at some of the Scriptures that describe what it *does* mean for Jesus to be our reward.

Paul's letter to the believers in Philippi is often referred to as one of the prison epistles because he wrote it from jail. Can you imagine? Bringing the good news of God's forgiveness,

truth, and kingdom had put Paul in prison. What a reward! Yet, when we read his opening words to them, he is clearly joyful and confident in the path he had chosen.

“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the *knowledge of Christ Jesus* my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may *win Christ*, And be *found in him*, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the *faith of Christ*, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I *may know him*, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that *I may apprehend that* for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the *prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*.” (Philippians 3:8-14, emphasis mine) This prisoner’s joy was that his Savior had bought his freedom so he’d one day know Jesus face to face! Our reward in Christ is a guaranteed, perfectly intimate relationship with God!

Isn’t such a relationship exactly what we crave? Intimacy! When I’ve been away from my family and friends on a long deployment, I want to know everything I’ve missed. I want to hear from my wife, who loves me with all her heart. I want to play with my kids, who want to spend time with me. I want to know my friends’ kindness or wisdom and see the looks on all their faces after we’ve been apart for so long.

We want to know what cannot be taken away: a genuine, intimate, and strong relationship with someone who cares for us. This is the goodness of Jesus being our reward – and not just knowing Him in eternity, but knowing Him right now. As we read in 1 Timothy 4:7-8, “. . . exercise thyself unto godliness; for bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that is *now* and of that which is to come.” (emphasis mine)

By walking with Him in faith & obedience, we experience His supernatural provision in impossibilities. When our burdens buckle our knees, we go to Him in prayer. When we hunger for guidance and security, He satisfies our souls in His loving commands and sure promises. When we are lonely, He gives relationships within His Body – fellow believers who have precisely what we need to meet us precisely where we are because He’s orchestrated the members of the Body just as He wants us. (1 Corinthians 12:18)

Again, it’s ironic. As I grow older and (hopefully) wiser, my body grows weaker. Just as I’m learning effective ways to maximize my physical conditioning in minimal time, my body is declining. Even though I believe I could one day enjoy a big bench press and fast 4-miler again (if God is willing), it would take me much longer to reach that goal. Is that how I want to invest my time? What reward would I be seeking?

The U.S. is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet one of the most obese, depressed, and violent. This may be the reward of being a consumer society, focusing on what’s in it for us. What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T. for Jesus - only He can satisfy our souls.

Additional thoughts on 'Reward'

All of us need an occasional 'attaboy' or tangible reward to remind us that we're on the right track or that others appreciate what we're doing. But Jesus' greatest reward is Himself: His plan for us, promises to us, pleasure in us, presence with us, protection of us, provision for us, etc. Please pardon all the alliteration – it's a pastoral preference. ☺

While training together, share praises of what Christ has done in your life – including the difficult things of stressing your soul to seek rest in Him. Tell them how these things help you grow beyond your comfort zones, convict you of the need for spiritual hygiene in your life, give you a new instinct for God's definition of maturity, and point to rest in His work. Let them know God is rewarding you through them.

Share prayer requests of how you want to enjoy Jesus as your reward in relationships. Ephesians 4:15-16 reminds us that Jesus is the Head of His Body, so we are to look to Him to guide and direct us. His people are the parts of His Body, so we should each do our part as He has designed us. But, just as joints and ligaments connect parts of our physical bodies, God has designed us for 'connection' with each other.

Where does your body hurt when you're growing? It's where your muscle groups meet: the areas you've neglected and are now stressing! But the focus on the passage is that Jesus is our Head. Praise Him for being your great reward! Just as our physical head sends messages through our nervous system and circulatory system to heal and strengthen our physical body, so our spiritual Head will send His messengers ('angel' means 'messenger'), His Holy Spirit, and even other Christians to heal and strengthen His Body! Again, He is our great reward!

Pray to Him while you exercise. “Lord, my legs are weak and my lungs are burning during this run. But I praise You that You never tire. Your Word encourages me that You don’t sleep (Psalm 121:4) but watch over me always. Your Word tells me that *Your* might enables me to prosper (Deuteronomy 8:18). You are my reward, Lord. Increase my faith to rejoice in You and not complain about my weakness or put my hope in my ‘strengths’. Thank You, Jesus! Humble me!”

God can reward your group by bringing other encouraging Scriptures to your minds, too. Through these, He will guide, comfort, and strengthen you. But a sense of reward is not always automatic or satisfied in the ways that we initially want. W.A.I.T. on Him. Try some of the following to help your group focus on Jesus Christ as our reward in all things:

- “From the readings in W.A.I.T. training, what sticks out most in your heart and mind about Jesus as our reward?”
- “What will our workouts look like when we’re exercising to express that we’re living for Jesus and enjoying Him?”
- (to an individual) “What do you most want from Jesus that you’re not experiencing in our time together and why?”
- “I think we had a great time today. Can you describe some of the moments of exercise and fellowship that reminded you of specific ways that Jesus is our reward?”
- “I found myself getting more excited about my physical fitness than my relationship with our Lord. Now I feel guilty and worse than before. Can one of you help me refocus on Christ?”

SACRIFICE – “No’ could save your life!”

Proverbs 25:27-28, Matthew 5:27-30 and Mark 8:34-36,
Romans 12:1-3, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33, 2 Timothy 2:3-4,
Hebrews 12:1-3



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

I've read several books on counseling that describe all people as addicts in some form or another. At first, I thought it ridiculous. But the authors (secular and Christian) agree on criteria for addiction that struck me as absolutely biblical: 1) a compulsive desire, 2) dependency, 3) attempting to bring relief from stress, and 4) little regard for consequences. Isn't this how His Word describes slavery to sin? Sin's euphoria seems to be in the synapses of muscle memory, trying to consume us from the inside out. The Christian authors went on to say that addiction is a contemporary euphemism for idolatry: searching for fulfillment in created things rather than in our Creator.

What does this have to do with fitness and sacrifice? When our body feels a 'need' (see the section on 'hunger') we tend to go to our addiction to relieve our stress. And all of us have idols that tempt us: food, exercise, work, etc. But look at the four elements of addiction again. God has designed us to be addicted to *Jesus*! Still, even the most faithful in His Body experience withdrawal symptoms when we give up our idols.

Sacrifice means giving up *our* 'treasure'. (Matthew 6:21) But who among us can easily do that? Jesus told the Apostles "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Luke 18:25) Knowing that each of us holds onto something, they replied "'Who then can be saved!?' But Jesus answered, 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.'" (Luke 18:26-27) If you're not sure what your idols are, read on. We need to be mindful of the devil's schemes so we can give up the habits that are killing us! (1 Peter 5:8)

There are many ways to identify idols. Just ask yourself what most excites you when you have it and most scares you

when you don't. Take a look at your bank transactions to see how you're 'investing' in your happiness and security. How about where you go and what you do with your time when you're stressed. Or make a list of your actions that have repeatedly damaged your important relationships, yet you're still having difficulty giving them up. You get the picture.

Intellectually, a hot-head might know that blowing up only gets temporary results and will cause even greater damage later, but their body doesn't want to give up the adrenaline rush and the physical release. A habitual liar may know that getting caught could destroy them, but their craving for even a brief good reputation is insatiable. A coffee-holic may know that caffeine only temporarily pacifies their enslaved nerves. And the junk food junkie can know that the high intakes of fat, salt, and sugar can send them to an early grave and still go to restaurant row to feed the fat roll growing around their waist.

So how do we sacrifice what we love? We have to find a *greater* love – a *perfect* Love. When we are convinced that the new love of our life is better than our old pacifiers, we will sacrifice our former ways in order to enjoy what truly satisfies – faithfully following Jesus. The Lord used graphic imagery in Matthew 5:27-30 to drive the point home: it's better to have a partial body with Him than to have a whole body in hell. We know His statement is hyperbole since God's Word promises His people perfected bodies when He returns (Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:39-53, Hebrews 1:10-12), but Jim Elliot, who was killed for his Christian missions work in Ecuador by the very people he had come to help is famous for having said, "he is no fool who loses what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Our sacrifices in this life are nothing compared to the riches that we gain in Christ.

I'll say it more specifically, before we will be willing to sacrifice the things that have weighed us down in our journey with Jesus we need to know *how* He is better than our former idols. This is why Paul takes the first eleven chapters of his letter to the church in Rome to describe in detail our need for God and His provision in Jesus death and resurrection. And then, in Romans 12:1 comes "THEREFORE, I appeal to you according to the mercies of God that you present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." If we're to give up our former loves, we must know the detailed wonder and glory of our new Love.

Another motivation to giving up our idols is seeing the results in our *relationships*. God warns us against damaging our unity by holding onto 'grey areas' that hurt the conscience of other believers. (Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-33) You've seen it in the professing Christian who insists that all believers give up all alcohol and immediately stop smoking or another 'brother' who demands to be free to drink and smoke whenever, wherever, and however they wish. These are unnecessary and hurtful points of division in His Body. God designed our bodies to express and experience godly relationship with others. But idols can tempt our flesh with temporary pleasures that seem to fill a spiritual craving for a sense of control, joy, etc. Only God can fully satisfy us.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch your body. What does it say about sacrifice?

Accept what you notice as His message about spiritual life.

Invest in what will last: His Kingdom.

Team with other believers to know the goodness of worshiping your Lord, and begin sacrificing your former ways to put on the new more and more. (Ephesians 4:20-24)

Additional thoughts on ‘Sacrifice’

Jesus said that following Him would mean taking up our cross, so we’ll have to sacrifice selfish desires that conflict with His.

Maybe your workout partner is weaker or stronger than you. Sacrifice your pride and change the weights for their sets with a good attitude. If you’re running, you might need to ask them to slow down for you. Or if you’re the faster one, you could wear or carry light weights and run at their pace. And you may need to be flexible to accommodate the times that they can work out and sacrifice your perfect time to exercise.

The *type* of routine that you prefer might also need to change based on the group’s goals. Does most of the group want to lift, but you want to run? Do they want to burn fat but you want to build muscle? What would be good in Jesus’ eyes?

Remember, God made us for relationship, not for individual preferences. If you’re creative, most of the time you can find ways to meet the needs of your body and still support your brothers and sisters in Christ. Our attitudes and actions of love must be more important to us than any other ‘achievements’.

When it comes to money, the Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. The same truth should apply to giving our time and even our sweat. Yes, sacrifices hurt, but think of all these physical sacrifices as an offering of spiritual worship, giving them completely to Him for His pleasure. This can help you begin to think of sacrifice in a whole new light.

There are many other ways to live sacrificially in the Body of Christ. You could leave that last bit of food on the table for a loved one – even if they don’t take it immediately. And if no

one wants it, maybe you could save it for a creative soup or casserole or even put it in a pet's dish. And if that doesn't work, think of it like alcohol: too much will incapacitate you from doing other things that are more important. Consider the alternative of wasting it to "waisting" it. Will you really benefit more from putting it around your midsection versus putting it in the trashcan? Do a gut-check and ask yourself, "Could I still get up from the table and play with my kids, help my spouse, or give my best in an emergency?"

Because so many Christians (including me, at times) have confused the American dream with God's design, we often tend to think of sacrifice as a bad thing. God doesn't call us to sacrifice because He's some sort of cosmic kill-joy. He knows that stuffing ourselves with the things of this world will eventually kill us. God loves enough to tell us the truth – which includes "stop doing that!" – even when we don't want to hear it. Let's love each other enough to do the same.

Loving each other can also involve helping each other sacrifice between our group meetings. For example, I know that I can tend to over-eat, which makes it a concern for my physical health. But it's also a concern for my spiritual health in a war against self-indulgence and for the witness of Jesus' Body. I would want members of my group to ask me, "How are you doing in your battle against over-eating?" If I pigged out at a meal I would want their assurance of God's forgiveness, but I would also need their loving rebuke because my body is not my own. Feeding my 'flesh' (pun intended) could put me in an early grave and rob my family of a husband and father. It could also pollute my conscience before God and others and hinder my community of a godly example. Sacrifice says 'no' to self so we can say 'yes' to God!

SAFETY – “Let’s be careful out there!”

Proverbs 4:23; 11:14, 18:10; and 25:28, Jeremiah 12:5,
Matthew 12:25-29, Luke 11:21-22, 1 Corinthians 6:12-13



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Military communities are big on safety. We require our Soldiers to be immunized; motorcycle riders and bicyclists on post must wear a helmet, reflective vests, and other safety gear; we receive safety briefs before every weekend to warn us against the dangers of drinking and driving, weather-related injuries, un-protected sex, domestic abuse, and more. Some units even devote an entire day to brief the Soldiers on safety.

But these briefs are concerned with protecting our bodies that will eventually die no matter how well we guard them. In Matthew 23:25-26 and Luke 6:43-49, Jesus explains that it is more important to guard our *hearts*, the fountain of all good and bad decisions. Neither physical protection, cleanliness, nor any other external work can keep our hearts safe. God designed us to live ‘inside-out’, and if you watch anyone under enough pressure, what’s inside them *will* come *out*.

All of us are eventually squeezed when our old nature tempts us. We may lean toward laziness when a friend needs help, or other people may try to push our buttons just to see if we’re serious about our faith. But be sure of this - the devil looks for exactly the moment to appeal to weaknesses. (1 Peter 5:8) And it’s too late to prepare when we’re under fire.

God has given all of His people specific ways to combat spiritual warfare: His Spirit, His Body (our fellow believers), and His sacraments, but primarily His Word. Let’s look at some of the risks out there, the benefits of safety, and how we can use those principles as reminders of our safety in Christ.

Consider Army units on a group run. When one of the Soldiers upfront sees a pothole in our path, the person running in line with the hole will raise their hand just before they reach

it. This signal is passed back like ‘the wave’ in a sports stadium so no one steps in the hole. In addition to preventing injury, the whole unit benefits by greater esprit de corps. Every Soldier who sees their comrade raising a hand in front of them realizes that he or she is looking out for their safety.

Christians can enjoy the same protection and unity when we lovingly warn a fellow believer against a potential danger. As Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 12:26, when one part suffers the whole Body suffers with it. The key is to do so lovingly, but even if the person doesn’t respond as you’d like, don’t fret - God still recognizes your action. (Ezekiel 3:18-21)

Or take a look at exercise machines with moving parts or heavy weights. They come with a risk of physical injury – even possible death and, therefore, have explicit warning signs depicting exactly what painful things could happen to exactly what parts of your body. Ouch! The best equipment comes with a note to seek professional instruction before using the machine. Now think of how many Christians come to faith with very little knowledge of Scripture’s warnings against the devil’s schemes to attack us and the injuries that can befall them. (Ephesians 4:27, 1 Timothy 3:7, 2 Timothy 2:26, etc.)

The person most likely to be injured during exercise is the one who tries to work all alone. In similar fashion, in Titus 2, Paul instructs mature believers to mentor younger Christians in how to grow in the life that God has given them. Such relationships not only protect individual believers, they ensure protection for the Body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

For the sake of our spiritual safety in Christ, we must be intentional in this fallen world. For example, playing football

on a hot day or hiking a mountain in the cold can be fun, but it also brings risks of dehydration and weather-related injuries. Choosing a playing field with a shady area nearby, bringing a cooler of water, and wearing proper clothing can make the difference between pleasure and unnecessary pain, even death.

When it's game time, safety requires that we plan ahead and provide the needed resources for athletes so the entire group is empowered with greater focus and energy. Proverbs 6:1-5 says we're to be most vigilant to guard our *relationships*, and Proverbs 6:6-11 tells us *how* – by planning ahead for the spiritually hard times to come, just like the ant for winter.

Because we Soldiers and serious athletes love what we do and want to be 'hard', we often push ourselves through sharp pains (which is different than the dull ache of developing muscles) without *saying* anything. Even worse, sometimes we tell others to 'suck it up and drive on'. That might work for Rambo on film, but real people experience sharp pains as a God-given sign that their body needs serious attention. When we take the time to form ability groups, monitor each other, and triage potential problems, we protect each other's health, the participation of the group, and the game or mission itself.

Shouldn't we give individual Christians as much attention for their spiritual health, for their participation in the Body of Christ, and for God's glory?

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God's creation for images of safety.

Accept these as spiritual messages to you.

Invest in the safety that Jesus defines by His Word, and

Team with His people. Living for the King is a team sport!

Additional thoughts on 'Safety'

God's creation reveals many examples of safety that we can use to help us focus on safety in the Body of Christ. That's because physical and spiritual safety can concern 1) the use of potentially under-developed resources 2) in unfamiliar territory, and 3) can feel scary. God's glory is not ultimately in danger, but our relationships and our joy in the moment can be at risk. If we're not careful, hazards can set us back.

If you've ever seen an advertisement for an exercise DVD or piece of equipment, somewhere you'll see or hear "Always consult a doctor first." Doctors are supposed to have specialized training and experience to help us identify and prepare for our safety. For similar reasons, before you start a group it would be wise to pray for and seek out a leader who has a known reputation of looking to God's Word and walking with Him. It's great if you have physical fitness gurus in your group, but if they tend to focus mostly on the body they may neglect God's Word and the relationships among His people.

You'll especially need to guard against risks that are unique to you and the members of your group: over-stressing a weak joint or heart, over-exposing someone with weather-related injury, playing rough ball with a hemophiliac ("free-bleeder"), etc. Many Christians often focus on our God-given personality strengths and spiritual gifts, but 1 Corinthians 12:22-25 reminds us that some parts of our bodies are weaker and other parts need special care. Otherwise, our whole body will suffer. In the same way, let's W.A.I.T. for His Body.

Watch for unique risks in your group: physical weaknesses, 'bad blood' in the relationships of some of your members, difficult personalities, etc. Accept the reality of these

‘weaknesses’, and admit *your* ugly realities to them, too. These are physical reminders that all of us are flawed and need Jesus to be the Head of His Body. Invest in building His Body according to the commands and promises of His Word. Team with Jesus’ people to trust in Him and work with each other.

Because our bodies are flawed, we will need to care for each other by listening to the physical warning signs of illnesses or injuries among our groups: sharp pains, light-headedness, unexplained numbness, cramps, etc. Yes, many of us are hard-headed and try to ‘tough it out’ while others seem prone to complain about every little difficulty. What right looks like (physically and spiritually) is probably somewhere in the middle. We have to push beyond our comfort zones, but there is only one Superman: Jesus Christ. May we humble ourselves and tell our friends when we need help, and tell them when we see signs that they might be in trouble, too.

There will also be times that, no matter how strong we are, our safety may still be at risk. During potentially dangerous or difficult workouts: heavy lifts, long distance runs, repelling, etc. In all such situations, we must always work with partners. If we’re running or biking on a very long or new route, it’s also a good idea to go with a partner or at least tell a friend about our route and when we expect to be back. In Jesus’ early ministry He directed His disciples to go out with nothing to protect their selves in order to experience God’s miraculous care. But in His later ministry when He was not so popular, Jesus warned them to keep safe (Luke 22:35-36).

Watch for dangerous situations, and Accept that you and your group could be in danger. Invest in Jesus’ armor (Galatians 6:11ff), and Team for safety.

STAMINA - “Good beginnings aren’t enough”

Proverbs 24:16, Isaiah 40:21-26, Hosea 10:12, Galatians 5:6-7 and 6:9-10, Ephesians 6:16-18, 1 Timothy 6:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 12:4-13



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

On 24 June 2011, the University of Virginia's Cavaliers and the University of South Carolina's Gamecocks played for the semi-finals of the College World Series in some of the most intense baseball their fans had ever seen. Danny Hultzen, USC's pitcher, struck out eight before the coach pulled him for flu-like symptoms. But Cavalier closers Branden Kline and Matt Price threw almost 200 times between them, even though closers are typically only good for a couple of innings. That's one reason they're called 'closers'. In fact, Price loaded the bases three times! Tired arm? Maybe.

The score was 2-2 in the 13th when Cody Winiarski, UVA's fourth pitcher of the night, entered the game and threw the ball away to sacrifice bunts - twice. USC won it, 3-2. Four pitchers. Four *good* pitchers. But on this night, that wasn't enough. The game was a picture of the need for stamina. I can't imagine what it must've been like for Winiarski to ride that bus home with his teammates. If they have true team spirit, they probably embraced him and suffered together. If not, it must've been a very long trip.

And that was just a baseball game. How much more important is stamina in the Body of Christ? James writes to suffering Christians who seem to have been fighting among themselves. In a very real sense, they, too, were on their way home. Notice how he encourages them. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:2-3)

Stamina is not just a byproduct of accidental hardships - God arranges challenges for us because our perseverance is one of His goals. Like the training before a PT test, hard times make us stronger - *if* we go through it and don't give up.

The decision for physical perseverance separates the pretenders from real Soldiers just as spiritual stamina reveals religious people and true Soldiers for Christ. Pretenders drop out of 12 mile road marches and never-ending grass drills in the same way that they withdraw from marathons of spiritual suffering. Pretenders become overwhelmed by the pain of the moment, but Soldiers for Christ keep going because they are energized by the better future for the Body of Christ.

Stamina doesn't *make* a person a child of God – only Jesus' sacrifice and God's Spirit can do that. But having an active faith that will not quit does *reveal* that He is strengthening our spirits for our long and difficult journey (1 John 2:19).

And stamina doesn't mean that we never fall – just that we don't stay down (Proverbs 24:16). There would be no need for God to call us to persevere if our journey was easy. Paul wrote to the Corinthians who started well (but struggled later) and encouraged them to remember that "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) Let's look at a few other passages to see how we can be encouraged to persevere through hard times.

1 Timothy 6:11-12 reminds me that the "good fight" in which I must persevere is about heart issues – not necessarily whether I have perfect Sunday school attendance. So, though I may want to focus on people or things *around* me, the real enemy is too often within. I must persevere to stay in His good promises and commands, to resist my selfishness, to build a base of trustworthy believers to hold me accountable,

to go to my Lord in confession for renewed love. I don't know about you, but even that list tires me! Read on. God's Word tells us that *Jesus* is our hope for perseverance.

Galatians 5:6-7 shows us the difference between being busy with religion and running on course with God. The Galatians had fallen prey to the false teaching that they should work their way into God's acceptance, rather than resting in Jesus' finished work. This passage calls us to compare the panic we feel when striving to catch up to God's perfection versus the peace we experience when we remember that Jesus carries us. The stamina that comes from Christ focuses on what He has done and will do – not our failing strengths.

But what if we fail again and again? Hebrews 12:4-13 tells us that believers will always feel the challenge of an uphill climb, but Jesus will always discipline (provide intentional training to) those whom He loves. Think of it like physical training: the 'pull' of this world never lets up and may even feel heavier, but God's Spirit builds us up (2 Peter 1:3-11).

Our Lord, like a loving personal trainer, will continue to work us so that we do not give in and give up. Even when we want to stop, He loves us too much to let us fall out. It is the Father's will that Jesus not lose even one of us. (John 6:35-40) And even though He could do it better without us, He blesses us when we persevere. (Esther 4:14 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-15)

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God's creation for messages about stamina?

Accept what you notice as His spiritual call to you and then Invest in His Kingdom. Only what is done for Him will last.

Team with those who want to run God's marathon with Jesus.

Additional thoughts on 'Stamina'

Most workouts have specific goals: running a certain distance, lifting a certain weight, performing so many pushups in a given period of time, achieving a certain shape in your body, etc. What about setting a goal for stamina in the Body of Christ? What would it be and how would we measure our growth and success? It depends on Christ's mission for us.

As I write this, the Army's current physical test consists of doing as many pushups as we can in 2 minutes, the same in sit-ups, and running as fast as we can for 2 miles (allowing some alternate event for Soldiers with an impairment or illness). But, also as I write this, our entire physical training regiment is being changed – largely because the tests need to reflect the requirements of our missions more accurately.

But even the best human research and development cannot forecast every Soldier's need for stamina in every situation. In fact, some units require additional events that require additional stamina: a 4 mile run, a 12 mile ruck march (or farther), complex obstacle courses, etc., and all at minimum times with other minimum criteria. But just because my *current* unit doesn't require these extra events doesn't mean that the Army won't send me to one of those units *later*.

The same is true of spiritual warfare: just because you or I don't feel a present need for great stamina doesn't mean that we won't be tested eventually. We would be wise to put additional stresses on our selves *now* in order to build greater stamina for *later*. In fact, if our lives are relatively easy now and we're opting to 'take a knee' for a while, our choice *not* to push ourselves will *limit* our ability to persevere in long-term difficulties later. So what is Jesus' mission for His Body?

Review Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 to jog your memory. God calls us to train for short-term needs *and* for the long haul. Some Soldiers call stamina a “gut check”, “intestinal fortitude”, or “staying power”. Whatever you call it, we will need physical, spiritual, and relational strength to make it through. God has called us to follow Him, and that will mean going against the natural flow of this world (review the notes on ‘pain’ in Genesis 3). If you can honestly say that your life has usually been resistance-free, it could be because you’re going with the flow of the world. All of God’s creation has to persevere in order to make progress – except maybe a dead fish floating downstream. I want more than that for you.

Here are a few ways to work toward greater physical stamina: only ‘rest’ between exercises by moving immediately into an exercise that uses entirely different muscle groups: e.g., leg exercises and arm exercises without any pause between. Or tread water while wearing a weight belt (always with a life guard present); decrease the intensity of your workout and increase the amount of time for each exercise (or your overall workout time) and gradually increase the intensity in future weeks; go power-walking (with light weights if necessary); and do all of these for at least 45 minutes at no less than 60% of your maximum heart-rate. Most fitness programs identify this as the minimum amount of time required to burn fat and to build stamina. In my experience, the temptations and trials of this world are much tougher than 45 minutes on a stair-climber. So let’s work for stamina now, and I mean hard!

Routines that require perseverance can be good reminders that we need *God’s* strength in His Body because our ‘strength’ (spiritual gifts, personality strengths, accumulated resources, etc.) will eventually give out. God’s will not. (Isaiah 44:12ff)

STRESS - “Progress will usually cost you”

Judges 3:1-2, John 12:24, 2 Timothy 2:3-7, Romans 5:3-4, 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2 Peter 1:5-8



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

In the last few years, I've had to be more creative in how I stress my body through exercise. My older joints won't allow me to lift heavy weights or run frequently anymore, but I still need to push myself to maintain the fitness necessary for the stresses of military life. But I'm okay with that. I've learned to *use* the stress of exercise to build my *spirit & relationships*.

Adjusting my workout for my weaker body is humbling, but the slow and intentional exercise has been life-changing for me. I use cardio routines to reflect on perseverance in Christ. But my knees and back will only let me run about once a week, so I might do 20 minutes on the elliptical, 20 minutes on the stair-climber, or a similar time on the stationary bike and do shallow lunges and "fire-engines" as I walk home. And when I feel pain where the members of my body connect (Ephesians 4:15-16), I pray then and there for the specific pains of 'connection' in the Body of Christ.

I also stress my bad shoulder differently. To remember the need for flexibility with my brothers and sisters, I work with light dumbbells for a fuller range of motion for 2-5 minutes per set. I may lay on a flat bench with the weights and slowly move my arms like I'm making a snow angel. When I begin to reach burnout, I may shift to a circular rowing motion, all the while meditating on the connections of my body's parts and flexibility in the Body of Christ – even when it hurts.

The recurring theme of W.A.I.T. training is that physical and spiritual fitness cannot be separated because God put our spirits into bodies to *experience* and *express relationship*. We physically experience stresses such as sadness, fear and others' anger as we relate to each other, and our bodies are also the God-given tools to express the same from our spirits.

For example, if I believe that my relationship with you will be good in Jesus' eyes, I will use my legs to take me to you; I will use my hands to help you; I will use my ears to listen to you in your times of stress. And if you believe God designed us for genuineness and intimacy with other believers, you will look for trustworthy Christians with whom to share your soul in times of stress. But because we know that not all people are trustworthy, we will be careful not to open up too quickly. God's Word is clear – following Christ will be stressful. But God's trials are never given as stress for the sake of stress. He uses difficulty to *purify* and *build* His people. (1 Peter 1:6-9)

Your spirit will experience and express the stress of genuine relationships through your body. In order to bring *constructive* stress on my whole being, I take two approaches to exercise. The first is to exercise with a partner and have meaningful conversation about the spiritual and relational dynamics that we experience in our bodies. If I *can't* find a partner, I use a mirror and my MP3 player with Scripture and specific Christian songs to meditate on the relational truths in my ears. The mirror serves as a visual cue to meditate on the wonderful and warped in God's creation – pictures of the gospel and the impact of sin in my body. The Scriptures and songs help me meditate on His commands & promises.

Again, the Body of Christ (all born-again followers of Jesus) is wonderfully created by God but warped and wounded by sin, so I incorporate praise *and* prayer into my workout. One of the ways I do this is by adapting the exercises to reflect the emotion of the passages or songs playing in the moment. If the content is about a close relationship, I may run faster on the elliptical like I'm running to the person. If it's about a struggle, I may increase the weight or do more reps to remind

myself to press ahead. If it's on praise, I may use an exercise that lifts my hands heavenward. Be creative and stress your body to *experience* your actual *spirit* and *express* His Word.

“No pain, no gain.” You’ve probably heard it and said it because it’s true. Growth requires pushing beyond comfort zones, and it doesn’t feel good – especially if we’re being pushed. But notice Judges 3:1-2. “Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof.” Wow! God will do whatever it takes for us to cling to Him as our safety, strength, and joy, including bringing the heat! Our Father disciplines (teaches) His children because He loves us (Romans 5:3-6, Hebrews 12:4-11, 1 Peter 1:6-9), and one way He encourages us to cling to Him is stressful situations: unexpected timing, new duties, losing a familiar resource, etc.

We can try to avoid our stresses - like Soldiers who know a PT test is coming but continue to slack off on their exercise and feast on fast food. We can see it as a human problem and seek more human solutions (more time at work, internalizing our anger even more, more reading about the problem, more friends who will take us away from the stressful situation, etc). Or we can use the stress for a spiritual breakthrough to leave our comfort zones in this world and live in the Body of Christ.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch God’s creation for the realities of stress in your life.

Accept these as spiritual messages for you.

Invest in the Body of Christ according to His Word

Team with His people to use the stress to grow in Him.

Additional thoughts on 'Stress'

Stress comes from any situation for which we're not quite prepared. Few of us really enjoy stress, but going through the difficulties can help us be more prepared when something even more difficult comes along later. We tend to do only what we do well, however. This may be why fitness gurus base their programs on the concept of 'muscle confusion'. In the same way, if we want real relational fitness in the Body of Christ, we have to do things *differently* than we did when we lived like the world – even differently than we've done them in our 'Christian' traditions, as stressful as that may seem.

If your body is used to running 3 miles at an 8-minute pace, try jogging 5 miles at a 10-minute pace or alternating 100 yard jogs with 100 yard sprints (Fartlek training). If you've been working with barbells, use dumbbells in the same exercises. If your muscles are telling you that you've 'mastered' your cardio routine, maybe you could exchange the road for the stair stepper, the elliptical for the stationary bike, bicycling for back-packing, step aerobics for Tae Kwon Do or Tae Bo, etc.

Are you used to a pyramid system, beginning with sets of lighter weight for many repetitions and gradually adding more weight for fewer repetitions? Fred Hatfield ("Dr. Squat") says to turn that pyramid upside down to stimulate slow-twitch and fast-twitch muscle in a more proper order - when you have the strength to move heavy weight at first and when you need to work on stamina at the end. *After warming-up*, start with 2-3 sets of heavy weight that you can manage for 4-6 explosive reps with a 1-2 second pause at the top. Then cut it by 40-60% and do 2-3 sets of 12-15 reps a little slower with a brief pause at the top. Cut the weight again by 40-60% and finish with 2-3 sets of 25-30 very slow reps with no pause at all.

This format is so intense that you may only be able to do one or two exercises that work multiple muscle groups.

You can also alternate your entire workout system: circuit training, occasional negatives (but always with a spotter), swimming, rock/wall climbing and obstacle courses, (with all necessary safety equipment), grass drills, calisthenics, and, of course, certain sports. Whatever you do, the key is to vary your routine about every 4-6 weeks or whenever you plateau.

If we are going to grow, stress must always be part of the plan and the most basic element of stress is change. Whether you change your form or speed on one type of exercise or change your entire routine, Watch God's creation, especially your bodily disposition of relationship. Does your body show signs of feeling *bad, mad, sad* or *glad*? Accept the reality of what you notice. You could also scale your experience from -5 to +5 (or 1-10) to help you realize the intensity of it more clearly. But don't mull over your current situation forever - Invest in God's Word. What does *He* say about 'fitness' in the Body of Christ? Team with His people to experience your stress and express His gospel together as you workout.

Remember, stress is about change, and W.A.I.T. training is for *relational* fitness. Don't be afraid to change the ways your group relates to build up His Body. Suggest working other forms of exercise into your routine. If everyone is awesome at what you're doing now, maybe you need a change. Have someone *else* read for a change. Call on the quiet person in the group, and ask the talkative people to give them the time that they need. Ask *every* person to give their reflections on the workout. Separate "buddies" and work visitors into your fold. Stress them just enough to help them lean on Jesus!

TOOLS - “Because we all need more than we have”

Genesis 4:17-26, Judges 16:25-30, 2 Samuel 22:36, Isaiah 6:1-8 and 59:15-18, Jeremiah 38:7-13, Joel 3:9-11, Micah 4:1-5, Zechariah 3:1-4, Ephesians 6:10-18



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

As a man, I appreciate a good tool box – even though I don’t have a ‘Tim-the-toolman-Taylor’ bone in my body! Maybe that’s a good thing – I don’t know. Anyway, I love having the exact tool to fit a specific problem right when I need it. But I equally hate being in a situation when I need a specific tool and don’t have it. It’s especially frustrating – even frightening – when it’s my health that needs ‘fixing’.

As I’ve mentioned a few times in this book, I have some ongoing pains and physical limitations due to two back surgeries about 10 years ago. I can no longer do the heavy rucksack marches or pound the ground on long runs for my aerobic fitness or do any heavy squats to build the strength in my legs. For a while, I was getting really angry and a little depressed. The doctors were telling me, “You can’t _____”, but the Army was telling me, “You must still _____.” How was I supposed to stay in shape with my new limitations?

That was the first time I took a serious look at working out with ‘girly-man’ equipment like elliptical trainers, stair masters, stationary bikes, treadmills, and – heaven forbid - weight-lifting *machines*! I had always preached, “Give me some ‘manly’ free weights and get out of my way!” Machines were for middle-aged women trying to burn 10 years of baby fat, office geeks, and couch potatoes hoping they could turn the clock back after wasting years behind video games. (Forgive me – I am speaking like Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:17, as the fool that I was) Now I needed some extra help.

The first few times were embarrassing. While most of the studs were doing heavy overhead presses, I was pressing ¼ of the same weight on a machine with a backboard to stabilize me. While they were sprinting on the road like gazelles, I was

moving my feet on the elliptical like I was running, but I wasn't going anywhere. If it hadn't been for my MP3 player or the TV monitors on the aerobics machines, I don't know which would have come first, quitting or going insane!

After a few weeks, though, I discovered something strange: with a little research on how to work-out wisely and a stick-with-it attitude, I could get a better workout when I added the machines than when I just lifted free weights and ran!

By design, the elliptical can work my legs AND upper body. By design, the treadmill allows me to increase the speed and incline to fine-tune the intensity of my workout throughout my run. No stretch of road can be “adjusted” for elevation! By design, several stationary bikes freed my hands to do upper-body exercises with dumbbells. Try *that* on a traditional bike (or maybe not). By design, weight machines allow me to target specific muscles or muscle groups, but almost of them provide back support that I can't get with free-weight exercises. I started getting stronger and healthier than I'd ever been before – all because I started using tools that had been designed for my success! Do you think our Lord has any tools that He has designed for our success? Oh yeah!

He's given some tools for our proactive spiritual health and others for our response to spiritual warfare. Let's consider a few of each briefly and one at a time. At this point, I want to be especially careful to communicate the utmost respect for the sacred things God has given His people when I refer to them as ‘tools’. But in a real sense that is what they are.

Corporate worship, the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism, fellowship of believers, and church discipline are

‘tools’ for our spiritual health (Luke 22:19, Matthew 28:19, Hebrews 10:25, Matthew 18:15-20). Think about it. They do not bring us to spiritual life, nor do they keep us alive, but they are definitely designed to build up the Body of Christ.

Again, I want to be clear. God commands these things and, therefore, omitting any of them from our lives is sinful. But they do not make us His people or kick us out of His kingdom. Even church discipline (which can have the eventual result of refusing a stubbornly unrepentant sinner from communion with God’s people) has the goal of restoration, not excommunication, and - in my understanding of Scripture - does not claim that the person has lost their salvation but that it seems they never were born-again. (1 John 2:19)

Our Lord has also given us tools to protect our spiritual health. I won’t go into any detail, since Paul does a great job of describing the armor of God listed in Ephesians 6 and other Christians have written volumes of commentaries and devotionals on the ‘tools’ God has provided us.

The question is, will we eagerly take up His tools and use them for the health of the Body of Christ? Or will we take my former attitude believing “those are for wimpy believers.” But, really, isn’t that the truth? Doesn’t Jesus say He came not for the healthy but for the sick, not for the ‘righteous’ but for sinners? (Matthew 9:11ff) So what are you going to do?

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch your body and soul for limitations, and

Accept that you need some extra help.

Invest in what He’s given you already, and

Team with His people who are just as needy as you.

Additional thoughts on 'Tools'

Even if you don't have a gym full of equipment available to you, there are still 'tools' of physical fitness that can remind you of spiritual principles. Let's think about a few of them.

When you put on your running shoes, notice how they're designed with extra padding to support your stride. The maker of the shoes did this to protect your ankles, knees, and back from the pounding that could otherwise come to your joints. Does God describe Himself as the shield of His people? Have you ever tried running or doing jumping jacks in your bare feet? Yes, I've heard that those new shoes with little pockets for each toe are supposed to be better for you, but that's hard for me to imagine in every circumstance. That's like saying a thin coat is better for you than a thick coat. Wouldn't that depend on how cold it is outside?! Our Lord shields us from harm by His providence, ordaining that some circumstances are not to touch us. He shields us by His Word, warning us so we know how to avoid trouble. And He shields us through other believers who are a comfort to us in times of heartache. Take the time to praise Him when you're jogging or even walking and feel the difference that protection makes!

Some of my favorite tools are the many types of weighted belts that you can strap around your ankles, wrists, or waist. One quick reminder, though: as always, ask your doctor before starting any form of exercise. Some research indicates that using excessive ankle weights, for example, can put too much strain on some of the tendons and ligaments in your legs. You must work smart. Having said that, the added weights can provide just a little extra resistance to work your perseverance during a long power walk, treading water in a pool, or jogging with someone who's not quite as fast as you.

If you use these types of weights, you went out and paid good money for them and voluntarily strap them to your body! Why? You know the goodness that a little extra ‘burden’ can bring over time. This being the case, meditate on the several small weights that God has added to your life that are building your spiritual stamina: learning to live for Jesus with difficult neighbors whose beliefs and values are very different from yours, parenting a child whose personality seems like a burden to you but is directing you to be more consistent in prayer and fellowship with other parents, maintaining a key relationship over a long distance, etc. God has added these to your life, and they may not feel like heavy burdens that can overwhelm you all at once. But because they’re there for the long haul, the journey is strengthening you over time. Praise the Lord!

And if you do have a gym available to you, think about how some of the specialized machines target exactly the body part(s) you need to work and how this may remind you of God’s specialized work in the Body of Christ. For example –

Every machine with free-hanging cables (triceps pull-downs, crossover pulleys, rowing systems, etc.) offers you a greater range of motion to fit your unique body size and movements. Whether you’re tall or short, use wide arcing motions or narrow, the machine literally meets you where you are. Our Lord does that, too. He’s made us different and He treats us different. Just look at Jesus’ relationship with the Disciples. He doesn’t take a ‘cookie-cutter’ approach to our growth!

When you use a machine with a backboard, you can praise Him for the extra support that He gives you when you’re under pressure. When you use machines with counterweight systems, remember that His Spirit is always ‘lifts’ with us, too.

TRAINING - “Show me, teach me, stick with me!”

2 Samuel 22:35, 2 Chronicles 2:12-14, Psalm 144:1ff,
Proverbs 22:6, Luke 6:40, 1 Corinthians 9:25, Ephesians 6:4, 1
Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 5:14 and 12:11



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

In this age of ubiquitous technology, much of the Army's mandatory training is now accomplished by interactive videos and slides on computer. And the more we learn, the more we learn that we need to know more. Hence, the required training on cyber-security, new email systems, wellness programs, knowledge management, sexual harassment, management principles, fiscal policies and more. I've talked to several people whose time is already so limited that they often try to skip the training and go straight to the test. When I've had the same annual training umpteen times, I've tried myself – sometimes with success, sometimes not. Which goes to one of my points: the goal of any training should be getting trained. The question is what are the most effective ways to get there?

Most of us have had some type of training that really opened our eyes to a better way of doing things and inspired us to go on with greater passion and insight. Think back to one of those experiences in your life. It was probably the person who trained you that made the real difference.

God has blessed me with some amazing people over the years who trained me in ways that changed my life. I still remember my first grade teacher, Mrs. Brown. What could possibly have been so significant about someone who taught me the alphabet and basic colors? After weeks of struggling with every in-class assignment in my first year of school, Mrs. Brown asked my parents to take me to see an eye doctor where I was diagnosed with an under-developed optic nerve. I have a birth defect that renders my vision to about 20-400 without glasses. No wonder I was failing. I couldn't see anything on the board – even from the front row! But Mrs. Brown never gave up on me or became impatient with me before I started wearing glasses, and she never laughed at me after I started

wearing glasses, even though most of the kids did. I must admit – when I look at pictures of me in those coke-bottled lenses, I have to laugh a little myself. But she never did.

Andrew Hodges was probably the next major trainer in my life. He was our high school band director in my sophomore year onward. As nice as Mrs. Brown had been, Mr. Hodges was just as disciplined and demanded the same from us. The former director was pretty laid back, and the band reflected his approach. We received mediocre ratings at competitions, had major discipline problems on our bus rides, and no real appeal to draw new members or to keep our juniors and seniors. The change was so radical that the size of our band dropped from over 100 members under the old director to about 30 under Mr. Hodges. We practiced longer and more often, ran laps and did pushups to build our endurance (and to discipline us when we messed up), and had devotionals and prayers at band camp and before games. But our ranking also went from thirty-third in the state to one of the top ten! I learned self-discipline, perseverance, excellence, and teamwork under Mr. Hodges. I'll never forget him for what he did in my life.

Don Eiseman also trained me in ways that changed my thinking about life in general. He was a retired Las Vegas trumpet player who helped me untwist my mind, lips, and lungs from 10 years of bad habits that I had learned trying to teach myself how to play the trumpet. Now that might sound a little silly, but you need to know that I was a sophomore in college with only one plan for my life: play the trumpet or teach band. But late in my freshman year, the more difficult the music became the worse I played. My tone went first, then my high notes disappeared, and eventually my body started to reject the trumpet like a bad organ transplant. My neck got

tight when I tried to play; I couldn't relax and breathe; and headaches came more and more frequently. Mr. Eiseman taught me how the lips, tongue and diaphragm can work together with relative *ease* to play the trumpet. Not only did I learn to play again, I enjoyed playing maybe for the first time.

And in 1996(?), Captain Michael Brandt, my HHB 3-62 ADA Commander introduced me to Fartleks (from a Swedish word that means 'speed play'): a running workout of jog, sprint, jog, sprint. There are lots of variations, but the one in which CPT Brandt trained us was a standard: on a ¼ mile track, warm up with one lap of jogging, then sprint a half lap as hard as you can go and jog the remaining half. Repeat this two more times. Then run a whole lap as hard as you can and jog a whole lap. Repeat this one more time. Then sprint/jog the half laps three more times, and finish with a cool down lap. It pushes your ability to sprint and to endure. Changing up the distances when you get used to one routine keeps your muscles on their toes (again, pun intended) and constantly growing. It's a great cardio workout, too. And no matter how old I get, I can use the same principle. For example, walk on the treadmill at an extreme incline for a few minutes and then for a few minutes. I can do the same with levels of resistance and speed on the elliptical.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch yourself for areas that may need new or extra training.
Accept that you cannot grow if you limit yourself to self-help
Invest in some seasoned, wise committed believers. Let them
Team with you to train you in new ways of looking at things and new ways of doing things. It may be better to give than to receive, but maybe not initially. Sometimes we need others' time, advice, confrontation and encouragement to grow.

Additional thoughts on 'Training'

When you're looking for a trainer (or whether or not to accept someone's offer to train you), look around the track or gym. There are probably people that you recognize from church, chapel, Bible study, etc. Their physique may immediately tell you if they know how to take train their own body and are committed to the process. But stop and watch them interact with others (if they do) and how they talk with their workout partners. This will give you an idea of whether they know how to train their soul and are committed to that process.

When they're giving instructions to the other person, are they really training the person, not only in how to care for their body but also in why certain principles are significant? Are they clear, direct and persistent but also compassionate when talking to others? Do they really listen to their partners, or do they seem to feel the need to be right all of the time? Do they take the time needed to get it right, or do they seem to rush the other person so they can to whatever is next on their agenda?

You won't find a perfect trainer, but you can find someone who is committed to building the *whole* person because they are traveling that journey themselves. It may sound like a "duh" statement, but trainers who only focus on part of you might do so because they only focus on part of themselves. They can't give you what they don't have, whether that is insight, patience, or experience. Look for a whole person if you want to grow as a whole person. Even if they are a hard-body in the gym, if they are soft-headed or hard-hearted those qualities could rub off on you, too. All of us tend to emulate the people that we respect. So we have to be careful with whom we surround ourselves. In 2 Timothy 2:2, we see that Paul knew that he was under the microscope, and he instructed

Timothy to train other men in integrity, too. Training is about much more than information. It's about godly application.

And even when you begin working with someone to train you, you won't always feel receptive to their guidance. Sinful fear will tell you that admitting ignorance is a foolish confession of weakness. To that I encourage you to rejoice in your Lord's example of humility. Jesus not only humbled Himself by coming to live in human flesh, if you look at Luke 2:52 in context you'll see that He allowed Himself to be trained by human parents and learned from them. Amazing!

Even if they don't seem to have any new facts or techniques to train, you can still benefit from their perspective on things that you already 'know'. I remember being very satisfied in my understanding of bench pressing – until someone explained the benefit of occasionally using dumbbells to exercise my stabilizer muscles. I also remember 'knowing' that I should not run more than once or twice a week because of my back and knees – until someone asked me if I had considered using the stationary bike, stair-climber or other cardio machines. I had been narrow-mindedly focused on running as the only form of cardio. Humbling your heart will open your mind.

Chances are, rather than working with a trainer who can mentor you in all things body and soul, you'll find that a good workout partner will train you in some things and you'll train them in other things. In Galatians 6:6, the Apostle Paul said that the person who is taught the Word must share all good things with the one who teaches. As I understand that verse, it means that even the older teacher can learn from the younger student and the younger student has an obligation to 'school' their teacher for the greater good of the Body of Christ.

VISION - “Identify the goal and start walking”

Numbers 22:31, 2 Kings 6:17-20, Psalm 119:18, John 9:1ff, 1
Corinthians 9:26-27, Philippians 3:12-14, Hebrews 12:2-3



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

By now, you may have a better understanding of how and why you need to grow in the Body of Christ. But with so many possibilities, where do you start?! How about a mental image of *what* you want to develop. Professionals in business and athletics often refer to this as a ‘vision’: a specific picture of a better future. Vision helps us focus on a clearly defined target that guides our progress and enables us to say ‘no’ to things that would waste our time or lead us astray.

In the section on ‘sacrifice’, I suggested that all of our actions are an attempt to fulfill some sense of purpose, but are we seeking *God’s* purpose or merely trying to relieve personal *stress*? Listen to Paul’s vision. “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Serious exercise is not random. Athletes train toward specific goals. They run before breakfast to burn stored fat; they work larger muscles first because those take more effort to reach muscle failure so they can still hit the smaller muscles afterward; they track their progress; they seek accountability; and when every other Soldier is on treadmills and weights in poor weather, they run outside and do pushups in order to prepare for the actual conditions of their PT test.

Let’s pause for a moment to reflect on some of the goals that we may be pursuing. Are we working for a certain image

in the *mirror* or well-rounded fitness in *Christ*? Is our goal *God's* or *ours*? What do our preferred routines reveal? Might our preference to exercise in private reflect that we fear others' judgments? Or do we exercise in public so everyone will envy our physique? It's easier just to run on auto-pilot, isn't it? I, for example, have to guard against using exercise to 'numb out' the pain that I experience in my work as a pastor. If there is pain in our lives, God wants us to learn from it. But if my vision is to have a pain-free life, I am more likely to 'self-medicate' with busywork, food, sleep, exercise, etc. and miss the relationships that God has for the hurting. We must embrace a vision that includes a biblical view of the Body of Christ: genuine relationships through interdependent living.

A few years ago, Rick Warren published a book that was an immediate best seller: *The Purpose Driven Life*. Whether or not we like everything in it, the book's popularity confirms that people want a clear picture of what right looks like. Proverbs 29:18 says "Where there is no revelation (חזון or "khazohn"), the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law." The Hebrew word can be translated as "revelation" or "vision" - a vivid picture of God's direction.

Everything we do reflects our pursuit of some purpose. But are we on auto-pilot or being deliberate toward God's vision for us? Even Jesus lived by a clear sense of vision. Hebrews 12:2-3 encourages us "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who *for the joy that was set before Him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Jesus looked beyond His suffering and envisioned the joy to come: saving His people!

It's amazing – *we* are part of Jesus' vision, and He loves us even more than He valued His own life! This love is what motivated and directed Paul, too, even in the hardest times. Look at Philippians 3. While Paul is in prison, he writes with excitement about his longing to “take hold” of the One who came to “take hold” of him (verses 13-15). The context suggests a picture of a sport in which an athlete is reaching forward for a prize. Jesus was Paul's passion and focus. He writes in the future tense about an intimacy with Him that he doesn't fully know yet, but his zeal is motivated by what he's already experienced in Him. The larger context of the whole chapter reveals that Paul is concerned about false teachers who are distorting the vision of who God really is - *gracious*.

God does not love us if we do our best. He loves us because He gave His best: Jesus, Who died in our place. We are to be motivated and focused because of His love. Our value, security and purpose are secured in *Christ*. What, then, will you envision for your life to fulfill God's goal for you?

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch His creation. How do you see other people living by a clear vision of where they want to be in the future? What will your life look like when your focus is Jesus? **A**cept these images as spiritual calls on your life. There's a saying, “if you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time.” But even when we are horribly lost in an unfamiliar city, we can get back on track when we have a specific address for our destination. **I**nvest in Jesus' destination for you, according to His *Word*. He made you for Himself and will help you. And **T**eam with others on the same journey to navigate your way with Him and to Him.

Additional thoughts on ‘Vision’

By ‘vision’ I mean a positive mental image of what we want our lives to look like in the future. Most of us probably have a vision of what we’d like to accomplish in our vocation, finances and physical fitness. But we should also set goals for our relationships in the Body of Christ. And how we build our relationships may be a little different from person to person.

Think about a professional athlete’s exercise programs. The routines of a major league pitcher will be very different from those of a hockey goalie or a ballerina. What do you want in relationships with specific Christians? Pray for believers who can help you. They may have similar interests or different strengths. Discuss your goals and work with them to tailor your routine to exercise your spirit in the Body of Christ.

Understand your *group’s* vision, too. If they want to memorize Scripture to respond in godly ways in sudden temptations or trials, you could do circuit training in which each person in the group takes turns “suddenly” choosing a different exercise. This could simulate the stress of unexpected challenges.

Even church and chapel sports leagues can provide ample opportunities to work through sudden conflicts: bumping into each other, disagreements over referees’ calls, personality differences in playing styles, etc. You could read relevant Scripture passages in team huddles, pray before and after games, print team T-shirts with Scripture, organize a ‘cheering section’ to hold up posters of brief passages about teamwork in His Body, form, persevering, sacrifice, etc.

During your group’s warm-up or cool-down, the members could share some of their personal trials and temptations and

how they want to turn to God's Word for these. Or your group could post small cards with selected verses printed in front on them on the stair-climber, treadmill, elliptical, or tape them to the mirror in front of a weight machine. If you do this, please clean the tape residue on the mirror afterward. It's amazing how the smallest actions - good or bad - can have a lasting witness. Whatever you choose, format the program to word toward your vision in Christ.

If your group's vision is to build more intimate friendships, you could meet before workouts to share your concerns and testimonies, choose exercises to exemplify the things you shared in the group, and meet afterward to share how specific aspects of your workouts illustrated some of the things you're going through or ways you want to grow and close with a group prayer by all.

If your group's vision is to understand God's Word better from cover-to-cover, you could use the general themes and specific Scripture references in W.A.I.T. training in a Sunday school, home Bible study, family devotional time, etc. Even in a home or classroom setting, you could incorporate mindfulness exercises such as a body scan on one's self.

A body scan is an individual's quiet internal Watch for any experiences in their own body (wonderful, wounded, or warped). Never require or coerce a person to do a body scan. They will only become more defensive and closed. For those who are agreeable, however, it can help for the person to close their eyes so as not to be distracted by anyone or anything in the room. The goal is to notice what's going on inside. However, survivors of severe trauma should not attempt this without a professional counselor. When in doubt, don't!

When the person begins their scan, I recommend guiding them to focus from head-to-toe to ensure a complete scan. But give them the freedom to choose - rigid rules will hinder relaxation and focus. Once they begin the inner scan, they should free-associate and voice any experiences, memories, and even vague sensations and mental images. Such scans can help us sense how our beliefs are manifesting in our bodies. A group member whom they trust can help them accept whatever the person notices. Others can help them invest in Jesus by reading an encouraging verse on the person's concern.

If your group's vision is to reach out to others, you could meet for pick-up ballgames at the local gym or community center. And after building a level of relationship with the new friends, you could offer them a copy of the book for future discussion or workouts together. Be honest and kind when talking with them about their vision for life, but don't demand them to respond with automatic faith or even thanks. Just love them.

Watch for positive things in their lives and watch for your internal battles of pride and fear. Acept that they are wonderful, warped, and wounded – just like you, but that a non-believer cannot be a spiritual confidant for you. Invest in His Kingdom by Teaming with His people to pray for them, love them, and talk to them about Jesus. Resist any desire to make them your 'project'. Our vision can be great, but the way must be paved with faith & love, not notches in our belt.

Maybe you're not sure if you're ready for a group. Or maybe you just want to enhance your group time by your individual time with God - body and soul. Your individual vision could be a greater mindfulness of your cycle of emotion, belief, and relating to others so you are less blindly reactive when you're

with others. I recommend finding a quiet time and place so you can focus most fully: at home in a room by yourself, before anyone else is awake, on a track that you can have all to yourself (or mostly to yourself), or on a treadmill at an off-time when very few people are in the gym. You get the idea.

Schedule a time that you can devote about an hour without worrying about getting ready for the next things scheduled in your day. Don't worry about your pace, the time, or anything that you can 'achieve'. Watch for sensations and images within you. The first goal is not to try to *become* something but to notice what *already* is within you – good and bad. And Accept what you find within you as *part* of you. If you prefer to do things alone (like workout by yourself), you are trying to Invest in Christ without working with His Team. You can't. What is one member without the rest of the Body? Take a look at God's Word and notice how many of His promises are to His *people* – *plural*! In fact, I can't think of many promises to individuals in the Bible. And even most of those are prophecies that relate to the person's place in His Body.

Remember, we Watch and Accept to *experience* the good and bad realities in *us* for greater awareness, especially by the spiritual imagery of our bodies. But we Invest and Team to *express God's* realities for the Body of *Christ* – to remind ourselves of relational fitness with Him and each other in His good commands and promises. To help each other express God's vision, we may need to be bold. "What do you want your exercise to express to Jesus?" or "You said your vision is to be closer to other believers. How could you express that in our workout?" or "What your spirit is expressing right now?" Help each other *picture* their vision so they can pursue it.

WEIGHT - “B.M.O.C.!” “Heavy!” “Phat!”

Genesis 11:4, 1 Samuel 2:29, Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Ephesians 3:14-19 and 4:11-13, Colossians 2:6-10



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Some expressions are popular with every generation. You've probably heard some of the ones on the left. Images of "weight" usually communicate significance or power. The person or thing in question may not be *physically* heavy, but the person using the expression believes it be a 'big' deal.

Would it surprise you to hear that this imagery isn't original to Americans or even the 20th century? When Old Testament authors wrote of God's glory, they used the Hebrew word כָּבֵד (kavohd) which literally means "weight". So it's no probably no coincidence that they also used the word שָׁוְיָ (shav) for "meaningless" or "vanity" in Ecclesiastes to express Man's hopelessness in a world "under the sun" (without God). שָׁוְיָ (shav) means the exact opposite: *emptiness*. So what?

It's about where we search for significance. Are we *proud* that we're 'solid'? Or are we *fearful* to 'step on the scales'? If so, we are looking inward and not upward. Faith in Jesus focuses upward to discover the significance & power of *His* weight so we can rejoice and be free. Inward searches lead us to be proud and 'full' of self until we have no room for others or fearful until we're so focused on self as 'light-weights' that we never try anything difficult. Either way, everyone loses.

In December of 1997, I was a Sergeant on a cold, wet field exercise in upstate New York when some news came over my 1SG's radio. "Congratulations, LT!" I couldn't believe it! Months earlier, I'd finally finished a long list of requirements for a direct commission as a Chaplain and I was just waiting on the results. It had been a three-year ordeal, but now I was a 'big' man. My CO allowed me to drive back to my office where Lauren had decorated my door with a big poster and colorful balloons. The actual date of commission was still a

couple of weeks away, but that didn't matter – I thought my world was glorious! For days, I left the stuff on my door to bask in my 'weight'. Only after I thought everyone had seen my good news did I reluctantly take down my shrine and carefully set everything on top of my filing cabinet.

In the meantime, I still had my responsibilities as our unit training NCO. It was my job to prepare our calendar, track Soldiers' qualifications on weapons and PT, and process their paperwork. One such Soldier in my platoon was trying to out-process my office but I couldn't find his files. Everyone said I had been the last one to handle them. Great! One more delay.

For days, I searched for his stuff to no avail. After about a week, I employed an old feel-better-about-myself technique: "Clean the office. At least I'll *look* professional!" - even if my job performance begged to differ. I swept the floor, arranged my desk, cleared out my in-box, and finally threw out the glorious poster and balloons on top of my cabinet. Guess what I found underneath. You got it – the Soldier's paperwork. My glory had overshadowed his needs. The 'weight' that I had hoped would empower me with significance to *serve* had actually turned out to be a bunch of hot air that *hurt* a Soldier. This is why Scripture says to give God the 'weight'. We just don't have the spiritual shoulders or heart to carry the glory! When we try, we eventually disappoint others and ourselves.

The story of Eli and his sons in 1 Samuel 2 makes paints a vivid picture of 'weight' and glory. Hophni and Phinehas were taking the best of Israel's offerings for themselves, and God confronted their father for glorifying themselves rather than Him. Read His specific rebuke in 1 Samuel 2:29. But Eli's sons would not listen to his rebuke. Why? Read what

happened later, in 1 Samuel 4:11-18. When the ark, a visible symbol of God's glory (weight) was captured, Hophni and Phinehas were killed and Eli literally died under his own 'weight'. It seems that he, too, had been feeding his ego!

Paul tells us "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8). We must resist the urge to 'fatten' ourselves and, instead, reflect on God's weight that is truly glorious. After all, what's more significant and powerful - having a body that can run 2 miles in 13 minutes or having a spirit that is inspired by His love, power, and wisdom to commit to the Body of Christ? What will benefit our families more – having arms that can throw our children in the air or a having heart that Jesus has forgiven and changed so we no longer scream at our children when they scream at us? The answer is clear, isn't it?

God made our bodies to express and experience our spirits, and we need to exercise the goodness of declaring His weight in our hearts and in our actions. We need to be open to those know us and love us enough to help us focus on Jesus' glory, not ours. And when the pressure is on and our real spirits show up, you and I need to have God's Word hidden in our hearts through memorization and meditation so we do not sin against Him by seeking our glory.

What is your fear? And who is your Love? W.A.I.T.

Watch creation, especially your body, for images of weight.

Accept these as spiritual messages to you.

Invest in His weight, according to the truth of His Word, and Team in God's people who know Jesus, in Whom the fullness of God dwells bodily! (Colossians 2:6-10)

Additional thoughts on ‘Weight’

The concept of ‘weight’ in the Scriptures is usually about issues of power and significance. So, as you can probably imagine, vision, rest, image and weight in Christ are all related. But they’re different, too.

How does weight relate to vision? Vision is a picture of a future aspiration (hope) toward which we strive. Having a clear vision can help us say ‘no’ to distractions, counterfeits, and lesser things. But human visions are often self-centered or too far for our failing hearts. A Christian’s vision (if it is God and not ours) is from Jesus and fulfilled in Jesus. We set our sights on Him because He is the author and perfecter of our salvation. (Hebrews 12:1-3) Only He can satisfy our every need because He designed us for Himself. Our weight in Jesus is our *guaranteed* significance (as opposed to a human ‘hope’) by *His* faithfulness. Every promise God makes to His people is ‘yes’ in Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:20-24)

Watch yourself and the members of your team. What ‘weight’ can you use to help others and what weight do you tend to throw around to earn or show your power or significance? Wisdom about the Bible or physical fitness? Encouragement to others? Great strength? If we use our ‘weight’ for personal gain or look to anything other than Jesus for our significance and strength, we are in the vicious trap of idolatry again. Take a look at your body - your weight (muscle or fat) may tell you where you’ve been looking for significance or power.

Accept that you may struggle with idolatries, and Invest in what Jesus’ says about your significance and strength in Him. When a member of your group seems depressed or proud, Team to remind each other that Jesus paid the price for you.

He has come not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45), and He sends us into the world to use our resources to serve - not to throw our weight around. When you notice God's work in your group, tell each other the changes that you've observed and the significance and power that you sense from seeing His work in your lives. Share the testimony immediately and express your praises physically in your workout - your witness to those who watch and hear you will speak powerfully of His weight! (Ephesians 4:29)

How does weight relate to rest? Rest for many comes after "hitting the wall" physically or emotionally. This is a runner's phrase for an involuntary full stop due to exhaustion. After giving all they have, those who don't know Jesus may collapse on a bed, in a bottle, or by a brain-dump in front of the TV.

Resting in Christ, however, energizes us before we even start the day, we feel refreshed because of His love, power, and wisdom are limitless. So we work more and more joyfully for Him. Even though we plow through the same work as non-believers, we know Jesus who gently and humbly leads us by His easy yoke under His light burden (Matthew 11:28-30). Resting in Christ first frees us to see and enjoy our weight in Christ. We cease striving to earn our significance and by our strength and begin serving joyfully. We know that *He* is our strength to establish our significance: growing in His image. (1 Samuel 12:16, 2 Chronicles 20:17, Psalm 127:1)

And how does weight relate to image? Our sense of image usually comes from what we or others' think about us because of what we've done: our worth based on our performance. Our image in Christ is based on what *He* has done on our behalf. God sees us as righteous because of Jesus (Romans

3:20-26). Our weight in Christ is our confidence because of how He sees us: righteous because of His death in our place. We know that only He can accomplish the ‘heavy-lifting’ of perfection, and He also promises to keep us to the end. Isaiah 60:21, Matthew 13:31-32, John 15, Colossians 2:6-10, etc. say that God’s children will ‘bloom where we’re planted’, and He will prepare us to be His beautiful Bride. (Revelation 21:2)

Watch for signs of where you look for satisfaction. Mirrors? Comments? Acept the good *and* bad that you see and hear. Examine yourself, but take heart, too - someone has said that we are far more guilty than we fear but far more loved that we could ever dream. So, Invest in Jesus. He has made all who follow Him “children of God” (John 1:12-13) and is pleased to give them the Kingdom. (Luke 12:32) When you turn from personal pride and fear, your newfound humble life may seem less impressive to others and will likely experience some ridicule and rejection – just as Paul did (Philippians 3:4-14). But you will finally find the inner joy and strength for which you’ve been looking. Team with other believers to continue making Jesus your focus, minute by minute. He calls us to relational fitness with Him, body and soul!

Ask each other “Is God the big Man in the room right now or not? If you sense the weight of His glory as we exercise and talk to each other, what’s that like for you? If you don’t sense His weight, can you tell us why and what that’s like?”

And point out God’s glory as you see it in your group. E.g., “Did you hear the way Frank encouraged Tom during our run? And did you notice Lisa helping Pam? They had to ease off on physical exercise to focus on their spirits and relationship, but I believe that kind of love holds a lot of weight with God!”

More Practical Formats

*To Experience and Express
Life in the Body of Christ*

Example tools

T-shirts

Eventually, I hope to upload this book, a Bible study edition, t-shirt designs and other tools for you to download freely at a public internet site. I have yet to establish the site, however.

The designs for the front of the t-shirts and corresponding Scriptures for the back are in JPG format for high quality and easy adjustment for different sized shirts. Most designs are hand-drawn pictures to illustrate principles in the book with corresponding Scripture for the back. Currently, I have shirt designs and Scriptures on ‘flexibility’, ‘image’, and ‘partners’, and I’m developing designs on ‘reward’ and ‘weight’. Other designs apply to broader concepts, such as ‘bad, mad, sad, glad’ (BMSG), ‘W.A.I.T.’ing, and ‘Body & Soul’.

For the BMSG shirt, I used simple circle faces (black for fear, red for anger, blue for sadness and green for joy), each with appropriately shaped eyes and mouths and the term for each emotion under the face. I printed copies of this shirt in yellow. The color schemes are a conversation starter. When others ask “why yellow?”, I explain that caution lights remind us to slow down before we act. In the same way, just because we feel the need to act doesn’t mean we should go with our gut!

For the shirt on “Body & Soul”, I designed a silhouette of a man on his knees and arms in the air for the front. Because silhouettes have no faces, it can represent a man in worship, pain, victory, anger, exhaustion, etc. or all of the above. The intent is to remind us that, because all of these are potential realities in each of us, we must live as whole people for relational fitness, body and soul. For the back of the shirt, I selected verses from Psalm 119 that picture physical images of

spiritual relationship: being laid low in the dust, running in the path of His commands, lifting our hands to His commands, our trembling flesh and panting mouths, etc. And I chose a script that looks like a hand-written letter to God.

A third shirt has the W.A.I.T. logo for the front and its three meanings and some related Scripture passages for the back.

The fourth shirt with a broad concept is a little deep, but it is foundational to the difference between faith in God and faith in earthly things. The front has silhouettes of two people standing back to back, each with their feet positioned like they are walking. The person on the left is looking down like Cain and his line who focused on earthly things (Genesis 4:-16 & 21-24). The one on the right is looking up like Abel and Seth's line who looked to heaven (Genesis 4:4 & 25). The intent is to show that our focus determines our beliefs, our emotions and our 'walk'. Within the head areas is the phrase "*I believe . . .*"; in the midsection is "*I feel . . .*"; and in the area of the legs is "*I am going . . .*" On the back are Scriptures relating our beliefs, emotions and relationships. I plan to print it in white on black shirts so the color scheme and silhouettes' focus will reflect the last passage on the back: 1 John 1:5-7.

Journaling

Journaling can take many different forms, but the basic goal is to understand yourself better by writing down the facts of your experiences and your thoughts and feelings about those same experiences to notice the patterns. The process of writing these things has many benefits. It helps us 'get it out' so the stress doesn't bottle up inside and fester in us until, like an emotional leper, we're too numb to feel the pain anymore. When that happens, our body is no longer listening to the

alarm system of our spirit. If that sounds like a good option, but ask yourself if you'd want to go running while your foot is asleep. Probably not. Feelings cue us to take action.

Journaling can also help us step outside of ourselves by letting us come back later to re-read our observations when we've had time to come down from the intensity of our experience. And the more we're honest in what we write, the more it will reveal what we currently believe is 'true' and 'good' for us. If this sounds painful, think of the spiritual self-examination like a physical self-examination: you really can't know what you need until you identify the specifics of your current condition!

Depending on your uniqueness and your situation, it may be better to write your observations in the moment or later. Don't worry about what you 'should' write. Just write down what comes to your heart or mind – little things, obvious things, seemingly irrelevant things, embarrassing things, the weird things, recurring things, incomplete things, everything! The more you give yourself the freedom to do this, the more pieces you'll have to make sense of the puzzle flying around in your heart and head. If you journal selectively, you may weed out something that could be really important.

Don't worry if your notes seem scattered. In fact, if you are journaling about important things, your notes should seem a little scattered! You will be writing about things that lead you to feel (you know it's coming) bad, mad, sad and glad.

So how can you make sense of it? After you've finished jotting down your thoughts and feelings – as random as they may seem – I recommend the following four-step process.

First, go back and circle or highlight only the emotionally-loaded words or phrases: use black for fear and perceived threats, red for anger and perceived injustices, blue for sadness and perceived losses, green for joy and perceived blessings. Second, move down a couple of lines and refer to what you've circled or highlighted and make two lists in this particular order: 1) things that you currently believe are 'true' in your life and, 2) things that you seem to value as 'good'.

The first list will reveal stresses on which you're currently focused. Even the things you've colored green are potential stresses. Think about it – if they were taken or abused, you would become fearful, angry, or depressed! The second list will reveal the ways you've been seeking relief from these stresses (or reward when you believe that you've done well).

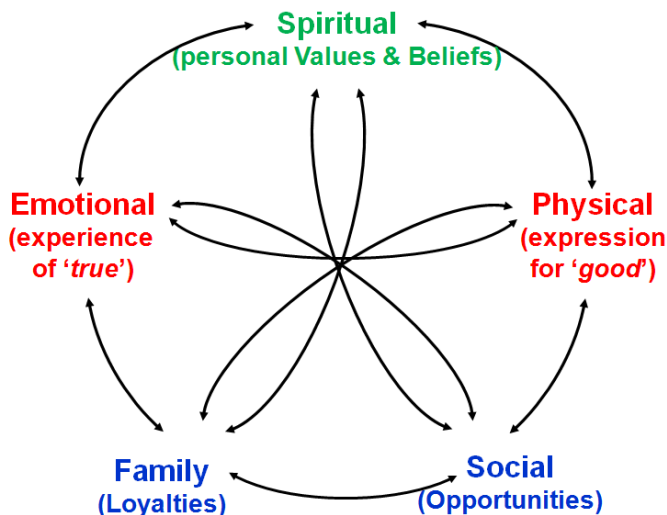
Third, go to God's Word and write down what's *actually* True and Good. Don't make it super spiritual or a research project. Just write down whatever you read about God's character and His eternal promises and commands. These basics will never change: His commands are True, so we must deal with their reality, and His heart and promises are Good to pursue for our relief and reward by His grace. Lastly, use your journal as a record of God's work in you, and -with discretion - share it with a trusted believer. They can weep with you, rejoice with you, and pray with you through future journeys.

To get your group started, you could give each person a pen that writes in the colors of the four emotions and post-it pads in yellow (to remind them to "slow down") for their notes. Or you prepare a journal in a small yellow notebook. Put the W.A.I.T. logo on the front and print/paste the following two pages on the inside front and back covers as basic guides.

A suggested guide to journaling:

1. Scale your current disposition by giving yourself a number from 1-10 (or -5 to +5), and give a brief description of what that means to you. (This is intentionally vague to encourage your maximum freedom of expression).
2. Give yourself a second number along the same scale to represent your goal in the small group workout today.
3. In the workout, record your basic actions, interactions with others and your thoughts at the time. (Later, for greater insight into your current beliefs and values, go back and circle any descriptions of fear in black, anger in red, sadness in blue, and joy in green.)
4. Whenever you sense that your disposition has changed during the workout, give yourself a new number and note in your journal “How did I just do that?” and “How did my group contribute to that change in me?”
5. (You may pass on this step) After the workout, tell the group your number at the beginning and what that meant to you. Then, tell them your number now and what that means to you. Lastly, (even if your number did not change) tell them how you managed to arrive at your final disposition and how they contributed.
6. In front of the group, thank any individuals who helped you in moving in a good direction. Tell them what they did and how those things helped your goal in the group.

Our body connects our spirit to our relationships



So . .

Watch your body in physical and relational stress, and . . .

Accept that your emotions reflect your beliefs. For example,

- If your body experiences *fear*, your spirit believes there's a significant *threat* and tends to express this by *avoiding*.
- If your body experiences *anger*, your spirit believe there's a significant *injustice* and tends to express this by *confronting*.
- If your body experiences *sadness*, your spirit believes there's a significant *loss* and tends to express this by *pausing*.
- If your body experiences *joy*, your spirit believes there's a significant *benefit* and tends to express this by *embracing*.

But . . .

Invest in what is actually True and Good, and . . .

Team with others committed to your resilience. For example,

- Believe in *True* realities *here & now*, not just your past.
- Value *Good* things that *help & honor* teams, not just please.

Color-code **current** **focuses**, **expressions**, **relational circles**, but **choose** your **future** responses for the Body of Christ.

Water bottles or Tote bags

Thru some websites, you can have the W.A.I.T. logo and its meaning printed on bottles or bags for your group. I like yellow because it can remind us to slow down and *wait*. The following text could go with the logo as a conversation starter for your programs with believers or non-believers:

Watch your body in physical & relational stress and

Accept that your emotions reflect your beliefs, but

Invest in what is True and Good, here and now and

Team with others committed to your resilience

Customized Eco-maps

An eco-map is an arrangement of multiple shapes connected by lines to represent your key relationships. Each shape can stand for a person, a group, or even an idea if you consider yourself to have a relationship with it (perfectionism, alcohol, religion, etc.). Thick lines connecting two shapes represent a strong relationship; thin lines indicate weak relationships; and jagged lines communicate conflicted relationships. I suggest *customizing* the format to express your beliefs and emotions creatively. Consider using different shapes, sizes, and thickness to represent your beliefs and feelings about that person, group or idea. For example, you may want to represent one relationship by a yellow flat pancake-like circle. Another may look like a large red jagged explosion. Another could be very small but have a thick blue border. And, again, you could draw the images with appropriate emotions in the four colors (and yellow to represent slowing down or caution).

“Food for Thought”

Your group may also want to eat together after workouts or on special occasions. To further their understanding of body and

soul, you could use handouts to read and discuss how food can affect our emotional, spiritual and relational fitness. I'm still designing this series, but I think I can give you enough now to help you grasp some of the basic concepts.

“Food for Thought” #1

“Mealtimes can shape our sense of personal worth”

- *Relationally*, we may have wounds from our family of origin if meals were times of fighting, eating in different rooms or at different times, being disingenuous (not saying what we mean or meaning what we say), blaming, favoritism, etc. All of these could convince us that relationships are not safe and must be ‘managed’ somehow just to survive them.
- *Bodily*, we may have developed literal alarms that go off in our body when it's time to eat. We begin to feel anxious, tense, or numb, so we practice physical habits to stay safe: finding ways to eat alone; dominating talks at meals so it'll go the way we want it to go; ignoring or punishing others who talk, etc. because it feels like the ‘safe’ thing to do. In reality, however, such actions just perpetuate the cycle.
- *Spiritually*, then we learned that mealtimes are ‘truly’ dangerous to our sense of personal worth, and we must find a ‘good’ way to be safe. (review pages 12-14 on Good & True)

This may be obvious, but one way to change this mindset is for your group to plan and follow through on regular positive experiences at mealtimes. That doesn't mean that the people around the table should put on fake smiles and avoid all hard conversations. That just perpetuates the myth that we can't be real and also be accepted. Just make your meals a time and place to care for the Body of Christ by His grace.

“Food for Thought” #2

“Foods create sensations that hinder relational change”

Much of this book has addressed the fact that emotions flow out of what we believe. But it's equally true and significant that neurotransmitters (NTs) in our bodies produce biological sensations that *resemble* emotions. I distinguish between the two because biological sensations can be induced by physical choices (foods, exercise, stress management, drug and alcohol use, etc.). Emotions are induced by our spiritual beliefs. Both can 'feel' the same, but they must be changed at their source. And it can be difficult to discern whether I should listen to my body's cues to fight, flight, freeze, cuddle, or huddle when my physical sensations have been befuddled by other variables.

Let's skip a long lesson on chemical biology and messaging in our brains and just think of NTs as fuel, gas pedals and breaks. Our journeys are empowered, sped up or slowed down by NTs. Serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine, and GABA are a complex arrangement - like fuels and pedals that regulate the speed of your emotional experience. But an imbalance among any of these will radically affect our journey.

- Serotonin may be the best known NT. It is a key to our sensations of happiness and helps defend against anxiety and depression. You may have low serotonin if you are depressed, anxious or panicky, have low energy, migraines, sleeping problems, obsession or compulsions, feel tense, crave sweets or high carbs, and have a reduced interest in sex. Your hormones and Estrogen levels can affect serotonin levels and may explain why some women have pre-menstrual & menopausal mood problems. Daily stress can also greatly reduce your serotonin supplies. Many

physicians in the U.S. believe serotonin imbalances are at epidemic proportions in the United States.

- Dopamine stimulates our sensations of motivation, interest and drive. ‘Feelings’ for love, exercise, music, and sex are stronger when we have enough of this NT. But high levels have been observed in people with poor GI function, mood swings, attention deficit disorder and even autism. And if levels are too low we risk problems with impulse control: drugs, alcohol, smoking, gambling, overeating, etc.
- Norepinephrine (a.k.a. noradrenalin) is a break, impacting our “fight or flight” response and regulating pain, mood, cognition, movement and blood pressure. If it sounds odd that our bodies would ‘stimulate’ pain and blood pressure, remember that we need such dynamics. Only if these things are too high do they become problems. We may not want our cars to go 500 mph, but we do want them to go.
- GABA (gamma amino butyric acid) is the major inhibiting NT in our central nervous systems. It is like a foot on the break. The more there is, the less some of our NT processes go. But necessary levels reduce anxiety and stress, and regulate dopamine, adrenaline, serotonin and norepinephrine. GABA also stimulates HGH (human growth hormone) which helps build muscle and prevents fat.

I may not be able to stop things that are already happening in my body, but I can make choices for tomorrow. If I don’t take proper care of my body, a little worry in my spirit can feel like a ton of fear in my body because I chose four hours of sleep, two espressos, a honey bun, and a sausage and cheese biscuit! It’s difficult to discern whether or not I should act on the bodily sensations in my relationships when I may have short-circuited my alarm system by putting sugar in my own gas

tank through like ‘happy pills’ (donut holes) or fueling up on ‘go juice’ (energy drinks) and ‘liquid courage’ (alcohol). Studies show that taking care of our body through regular exercise, rest and other forms of stress management helps maintain proper levels of NTs. But the simplest and most neglected way is nutritious food and sufficient food.

Norepinephrine is produced from dopamine with the help of certain amino acids, vitamins and minerals from foods. Some of the natural sources are almonds, apples, avocado, bananas, beef liver or kidney, blue-green algae, cheese, fish, most green vegetables, lean meat, nuts, grains, pineapple, poultry, and tofu. Some of these foods help build endorphins/enkephalins, our bodies’ natural pain-killers. So we must eat right, but we must also eat enough – not a popular message right now! Studies from Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Oxford, have documented that women on diets deplete significant levels of serotonin in the first three weeks. This eventually leads to increased cravings, moodiness and poor motivation, contributing to rebounding in weight gain.

Of course, exercising regularly can help. But choose a format that you enjoy (as much as possible) so you’ll keep coming back. Reject fad diets and radical cutbacks on food. Eat balanced meals, and if you are eating too much, cut back on seconds, desserts, sweet or fatty snacks and late-night eating.

“Food for Thought” #3

“Most of us have an eating disorder but don’t know it”

“Sorry if I’m a little moody, but I haven’t had my coffee yet.”

“I *need* some chocolate!” “I know you don’t like this place, but I haven’t eaten here in so long. We just had to come!” “I don’t know what it is about _____. It’s one of my comfort

foods!” “It’s definitely time for a *beer* (or glass of wine, shot, etc.)!” “I know it’s not good for me, but once I get started on _____ it’s hard to stop!” “I put _____ on all of my food.” “I like to get the same thing to eat every time.” And on and on.

Have you ever heard one of those or something like it from family or a friend? Ever thought it yourself? *Must* our food *always* or *never* be eaten alone, eaten as fast as possible, on time, prepared or presented a certain way, as much or little as possible, etc.? Anytime we are passively affected by or actively rely on anything as a *mood altering experience of our behavior in relationships*, it is a dis-order of God’s design for our beliefs, emotions and actions in godly relationships. Read 1 Corinthians 14:33ff and Philippians 3:19ff in context.

Food is emotional for at least two reasons: 1) our soul has learned relational meanings that we’ve come to associate with mealtimes, and 2) our body has learned to ‘need’ certain foods to release the neurotransmitters to make us feel more or less _____. The question is, what are we going to do about it?

“Food for Thought” #4

“Our pantry reflects our ‘operational theology’”

Have you ever visited a new neighbor’s house and seen their collection of movies, music CDs, or books? It can tell you a lot about them. In the same way, your pantry (where you keep your groceries and related items) can say a lot about you.

The dictionary definition of ‘theology’ is the study of God, but isn’t our ‘theology’ what we believe is True (and, therefore, must be addressed) and Good (helpful to deal with reality and honorable). But what we *say* we believe isn’t always what we *do*. If you want to know what a person truly believes, listen to

them less and watch them more. Our 'operational' theology will be reflected in our banking transactions, leisure routines, and, yes, our groceries. What are your beliefs and values?

Is the theme of your pantry gourmet foods and the best labels? That might mean you believe that someone in your family should have the very best at any cost. Is that your pride or guilt induced by someone else? I don't know. But themes reveal consistent choices while other choices were rejected. Is your pantry full of quick-fix foods? Maybe someone in your family values the time and activities outside the home, so you have little time left in your home. Does your pantry have a high percentage of sweets or alcohol? Because sugar and alcohol are two of the fastest mood-altering 'foods', these are likely stocks of immediate relief from stress or rewards for self-perceived greatness. Do some of these describe you?

What have you placed within easiest reach? These may be the things you expect to reach for most frequently. What does that say about what or who is valued? Are some items placed out of reach of others or even hidden? Who put them there and to keep them from whom? Repeated actions have meaning. Is your pantry stocked mostly with favorites of one member of your family? Probably no more explanation needed there.

Again, once we've identified our bad news, it's time to turn to the Good news. When we use food for feelings of security, energy, status, reward, power, etc. we are trusting in it rather than God. That is idolatry. And we cannot experience the sweetness of His storehouses until we stop gorging ourselves on substitutes, become hungry again and begin feeding on His provisions. Yes, it will be painful to give up habits that seem to have worked for us, but that is what it means to die to self.

Example programs

Example program #1

“The Spin Zone”

With some fairly low-cost software, you can make a DVD of music videos (with Christian content or Army Values) from those posted by the record companies or the artists on public domain websites and use them in a spin bike class. In the list of songs suggestions at the end of this book, at least two or three songs from each section have such videos posted on the internet. I like the idea of a spin class for several reasons: 1) music is inherently emotional and can more quickly reveal your hopes and hurts (but please read my caution at the end), 2) such classes are usually held in a large room in which you could easily set up a projector, screen and speakers for your group, 3) by using spin bikes you free your hands for greater self-expression to raise your hands to heaven, press or pull against your hands in different directions to picture spiritual dynamics, use light dumbbells to augment the workout, or incorporate the idea of journaling and/or the water bottles, and 4) the suggested title can remind you of a good sense of ‘spin’: portraying a positive meaning from a bad situation by focusing on only one part of the issue. Politicians are often accused of redirecting our focus for their own gain by ‘spin’. But in W.A.I.T. training, we *want* to redirect our focus for our gain in *Christ* and His *Body*! You might also consider following up the exercise time with journaling, discussion and prayer.

Example program #2

“Haul/Walk Fun Groups”

Maybe you’ve already heard one of my intentions for this program in its title: living the concept of “crawl, walk, run” by growing from wherever we are. If your town has a public

track with a gate around it, you can use this walking program for entire families. W.A.I.T. training t-shirts can prompt discussion and Scripture memory as you walk. Stronger individuals can don weight vests, carry dumbbells and walk with backpacks or baby strollers to keep your group together.

A few tough guys could even push empty wheelbarrows to carry others' weights when they need a brief reprieve from the burden (a picture of Galatians 6:2)! Children can toss or kick a ball to each other around the track or play on the ball field inside the track. Note for safety, keep any children on the track in the inside lane and any weights and wheelbarrows in the outside lane.

Example program #3

"Stretch it out"

This program is extremely flexible (I just can't resist those puns!). You can use it with broader audiences of age and physical ability or even shortly after mealtimes because it's not physically demanding. You can use it in a later in a day-long workshop after a previously strenuous program.

The title refers to the content, goal and process of the program. The content is probably clear. I recommend use some of the simpler and more relaxed yoga-like poses and stretches that involve several muscle groups. The goal is to help the group stretch their way of thinking about fitness: that it is about relationships, body and soul. And the process is to facilitate the stretches in ways that help the members experience and express symbolic meanings associated with the exercises.

The facilitator could either use the exercises to facilitate discussion and prayer during the stretches or have them

remain completely silent and journal every few minutes. You might even try both and see what works. If the group just doesn't want to talk or they only talk "up in their heads" (intellectual or superficial facts) as opposed to down in their hearts, have them journal. But, for the sake of unity, I suggest that the group agrees on one or the other. Don't divide them.

Don't worry so much about the type of stretching. The goal of this program is to stretch their thinking about relational fitness. You're using their physical body to help them think, but it's not primarily about their body. You could do rotations and switch directions, stretch one side and then the other, stretch forward and then back. Search stretches on the internet to prepare if necessary. Thirty stretches can give them thirty minutes to think. To keep it simple, you can start at one end of the body and move to the other with the following steps:

1. He or she names the muscle(s) to be stretched
2. Describe one of its function in our body
3. Makes an analogy to relational functioning in His Body
4. Leads the group in the stretch for about a minute. You could also ask the group if they would like more time.
5. And either draws out members' thoughts and feelings or signals when to break and journal for a minute.

Here are a few examples, but not the only or best examples:

1. "Let's stretch our minds as we start with our necks."
2. "We don't think about our necks very much, but these small muscles connect our brain to our brawn."
3. "As we stretch, think about ways that our Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church is connected to His Body."
4. Lead them in stretching for about a minute.

5. If your group decided they want to talk, I suggest that the leader draws out individuals whose faces reveal that they are thinking or feeling. If your group decided to journal, I suggest you do after each stretch or two.
1. “Now let’s move to stretching our shoulders.”
 2. “Maybe you’ve heard the phrase ‘shouldering burdens’. Our shoulders often carry heavy loads making them strong *and* tired.”
 3. “That’s true of individuals in the Body of Christ, too, isn’t it? Sometimes the burdens He places on us make us strong, but sometimes they make us tired.”
 4. Again, lead them in stretching for about a minute.
 5. Lead them in discussion during the stretch or break for journaling after.
1. “A few chest stretches now”
 2. “Our chest ties our shoulders together.”
 3. “Think of burdens that you have on one side of your life, burdens on another side (like work and home or relationships in your family and relationships with friends) and how Jesus would want you to tie them together.
 4. Lead them in the stretch. Because the chest can be a sexually attractive area of the body, if you have a mixed group you might ask them (for all exercises) to close their eyes during the stretches to help them concentrate without distraction.
 5. Again, facilitate discussion or cue them to journal after.

You get the idea. If you’re concerned that you can’t come up with or remember so many stretches, consider asking other members to take some of the muscles groups. Just be sure to

ask members who are spiritually mature (2 Timothy 2:2) so you can be reasonably sure they will be biblical and kind.

Example program #4

“Heartbeats”

This format is too easy. First, choose a venue with lots of options for exercise (a track or field with plenty of space, a gym with plenty of weights and machines, etc.), 2) instruct the participants to exercise in a minimum group of twos and do whatever it takes to maintain a relatively high heart rate, and 3) encourage all individuals to journal as they exercise.

The title is to remind them of the outer guideline and the inner discoveries they’re to seek under physical and relational stress.

Using W.A.I.T. training principles for non-Christian programs

In my opinion, one expression of love toward non-believers could be to help them grow in their sense of mindfulness and cohesion with others. But we should not expect them to buy into our faith and commitment to Jesus in order to receive this.

Would we refuse to feed a beggar if he wouldn’t go to church with us? I hope not! Of course, we hope and pray for God-given opportunities to offer them spiritual food that will last for more than a day. If you’re a Soldier, by this time I hope you will agree that any of these programs could be used to legitimately fulfill all five areas of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: spiritual, emotional, physical, family and social resilience. For the same reasons, Chaplains could use the programs for Community Health Promotion. Let’s show the world that our faith reaches and blesses every area of our lives.

We can meet their felt needs like the Lord Jesus feeding the 5,000 and begin to earn the right to be heard later. I suggest that you teach them the principles in general terms, however:

Watch your body in physical & relational stress and
Accept that your emotions reflect your beliefs, but
Invest in what is True and Good, here and now and
Team with others committed to your resilience

There is no longer any reference to the gospel, but it can help them grow and may lead them to long for more later.

“Haul/Walk/Fun Groups” could be adapted to include Jewish Soldiers using only the ‘Body & Soul’ t-shirt designs with physical imagery of spiritual worship in Psalm 119. If you do this, I recommend that you advertise and conduct the program as religious education or spiritual awareness. Conservatives in both groups, Jewish people and Christians, could be confused and offended if this had the appearance of intimate fellowship.

“Stretch it out” could also be adapted to groups of non-Christians by refer to the muscles more generally as parts of their family, work group, sports team, neighborhood, etc.

Similarly, *“Heartbeats”* could use a more general focus on Army Core Values for group members to experience their current beliefs and values and to express future beliefs and values in relationships. As you can imagine, options abound.

Example program #5

“6/12/24 Teams”

This workout uses heavy to moderate weights and is based on principles outlined by Dr. Fred Hatfield, a famous power-lifter with a PhD and competencies in sport psychology, motor

learning and sport sociology. I briefly describe his format in the section on “Stress”. Perform the weight and speed exactly as Hatfield recommends and work in teams of two to spot the lifter during muscle failure. I also recommend machines over free weights. The greater safety can allow more focus on the truths you are experiencing or expressing. The spiritual part of the format is in the second meaning of “6/12/24”.

Ask the participants to think about a significant group of 6 people in their life: family, their team at work, close friends in the area, etc. When they do the first two sets of six, they are to think about these people as they give it all they’ve got. During sets of 12, meditate on being with these people in an average 12 hour day at work, school, homemaking, etc. And count your repetitions like hours on a clock: 5 (wake-up), 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. For the sets of 24, meditate on the same group of 6 people, but in the context of a 24-hour event: a 24-hour sleep over, work shift, a day and night with them in the hospital, a road-trip, etc. This format will be physically and spiritual demanding, so spotters need to help the lifters in body and soul: note body language and encourage them to voice what they’re thinking and valuing. Teams could read Scripture and pray to focus on His Body. But choose together.

Example program #6

“Reflections”

My first intent for this program is for Soldiers to ‘exercise’, meditate on, and discuss Army Core Values, but it could be adapted for other purposes as you’ll see. The training should be held in a mirrored room (like one used for aerobics) with small posters of the seven Core Values taped on the mirrors (being diligent to remove and clean any tape residue after).

The steps are fewer and even briefer than those outlined in “Stretch it out” because the meaning and application of these values has been drilled into them. *We’re going to use that!*

When you advertise the class, let them know the purpose. Like “Stretch it out”, it’s to help them think about and exercise relational fitness, body and soul. Give them a basic outline of the class (outlined below). And be sure to tell them that it will involve journaling because only the facilitator will speak. You should also ensure that they have the colored pens and pads.

1. The leader names the Core Value to be ‘exercised’
2. Describes a relevant situation (*not an application*)
3. Leads the group in a Physical Readiness Training exercise that pictures the dynamic of the Value for two minutes, using two exercises for each Value.
4. Break to journal after each Value is completed

I recommend working for at least 2 minutes per exercise for two reasons. It’s been the standard of Army Physical Fitness Training tests for decades, so even this measure of time is emotionally significant. And, given the exercises, it will also take their bodies pretty close to muscle failure, thus, helping them to experience their spirits under stress.

I also recommend total silence for this format and audience. Many Soldiers are hesitant to express their personal beliefs and emotions – they’ve been trained to act in unified, not individual ways. But the way I’m going to suggest that you introduce and conduct the exercises will likely bring up lots of emotion in them. And if they’re told they can’t talk but are encouraged to journal (and that it is for their eyes only), that emotion will need to go somewhere: the pages of the journal.

With each of the Values getting four minutes for exercises and a minute to journal, the program will last at least 35 minutes. Again, the primary goal is not to help Soldiers maximize their PT tests, but it's plenty of time to help them generate and write down some of their actual beliefs and values.

A follow-up breakfast can be a great venue to guide the group in talking about 'what right looks like': experiences they've had with others who've lived one or several of the Army Core Values. Keep the time focused on describing these role models and how their influence is still motivating the Soldiers today.

Consider some of the following suggestions:

1. "Loyalty . . ."
2. "When our leaders tell us to jump . . ."
3. Then immediately lead them in the Tuck Jump. I suggest that everyone faces the mirrors to 'reflect' (get it?) on the exercise and its relational meaning but also to maintain eye contact with each other. Remember, the primary goal of W.A.I.T. training is not physical. It is relational fitness, body and soul. This is what's likely to happen

Individuals will think of their relationships to others in the group (or people they're reminded of) as leaders for whom they have to 'jump'. If it's a positive thought, they might jump with great energy because they're thinking of pleasing them; they may become quickly embarrassed because they can't 'jump' with as much vigor for long. If it's a negative thought, they may be passive-aggressive and not jump or jump half-heartedly. Adding this relational stress to the group's physical stress can reveal their true hearts more quickly and intensely.

Yes, this may be uncomfortable, but we can't know how to help each other's spirits until we know more specifics of our struggles. After the group session – maybe at a follow-up breakfast – you could discuss these discoveries and pray for each other. Were you struggling with perceived threats? Were you dwelling on a sense of injustice? Who seemed to feel some sense of loss? Who seemed to believe they have blessing in their life? And do these merely seem 'true' because they're powerful experiences and 'good' because they're pleasant? What would be True and Good? It can be risky to say what we observed in others and to hear what they saw in us. This should only be done where there have been clear relationships of trust and acceptance.

Then continue with another exercise or two that touches on different aspects of the same Value, and introduce each one with a similar situational introduction. For example . . .

“Loyalty also applies to the people under our care. Often, we have to reach down and lift them up. Face your hands together like you're holding their world in your hands to bend down and reach to lift them up . . .”

“The Bend and Reach!”

After you've completed two exercises for the Value, give them a moment to journal – but not too long. Remind them (before the program begins) that it's okay to write whatever came to mind, even single words or incomplete thoughts. Give them time to sort it out later. You can take them through the steps outlined in “*Journaling*” above.

“Duty” in the absence of orders or direction can be pictured by the Forward Lunge, stepping up to the plate to take initiative.

And fulfilling requirements of the laws high above us can be represented by the High Jumper.

“Respect” for others can demonstrated by sitting up to greet them with Rowers. And recognizing their worth can be shown by giving them a lift on your Supine Bicycle. Don’t laugh, it takes sacrifice and dedication to stop what you’re doing and give someone a ride. Okay, laugh a little.

“Selfless Service” is about humbling ourselves on our knees and working hard for others pictured by Six Point Pushups. And we must crawl through hardship with them even when it seems that we’re making no progress, like Mountain Climbers.

“Honor” bows to what is morally right even when that is difficult. Single-Leg Dead Lifts can symbolize this. And Alternate ¼ Turn Jumps can remind us that we raised our hand to take an oath, no matter where we turn.

“Integrity” reaches for the high standards of what is legally and morally right, like Front Kicks and Alternate Toe Touches. Windmills can represent that we sometimes do this at personal cost, whether we come out on top (arms raised to the side) or down low (reaching down to our foot).

“Personal Courage”, like Frog Jumps to the Front, leaps into physical danger when necessary to do the right thing. We must also turn to face moral danger to the left and right, even when it has knocked us flat on our back: a perfect picture of the Bent Leg Body Twists.

Use your imagination to choose other ways to ‘exercise’ each of these Values to help them experience and express relational fitness, body and soul.

An example one day workshop

Email copies of the book to congregations, secure the gym, track, rooms, and funding for meals, print books and shirts in various sizes. Advertise the workshop as a Comprehensive Christian Fitness program for small groups (4-8 per leader) on relational fitness, body and soul. Emphasize a modest dress code for exercises (loose fitting clothes, covering the neckline, shoulders and thighs). Show an introductory video clip, the book, and example T-shirts. Provide a written, detailed itinerary of the program, and confirm enough names for at least one group. Train other facilitators to help you.

0600-0730: Small Group Workouts – each leader facilitates one exercise format chosen by their group (calisthenics, power walking, free weights, yoga, etc.) to unify their group and to simplify their focus on W.A.I.T. training principles.

0730-0800: Personal Hygiene (at a nearby public gym)

0800-0900: Large Group Breakfast – prepare & eat a healthy breakfast together (boiled eggs, fruit salad, multi-grain breads, gluten-free alternatives, granola, yoghurt, low-fat peanut butter, milk, turkey sausage, etc.), and have a leader speak on a topic in W.A.I.T. training that is particularly relevant to the group (balance, connection in Christ's Body, emotions, etc.)

0900-1130: Small Group Forums (with at least one 10 minute break) – each leader guides open discussions on the members' experiences during the workout, the speaker's message at the breakfast, what they see in God's Word on relational, spiritual and physical fitness, and how they are being impacted so far as individuals and as a group. Each person should also voice their goals for the afternoon Game Time, how they want to move toward these goals and any help they may need.

1130-1400: Lunch and Devotions – encourage members to break up into smaller groups for more personal conversations with friends during lunch but also allow time for each person to spend time alone with God and to be back by 1400.

1400-1500: Large Group Review and Preparation – a leader facilitates discussion on 1) what has been helpful for relational fitness as the Body of Christ so far, 2) how we can apply the same truths and practices to care for our families & friends during Game Time, and 3) when and how we may need each others' help to resist our former reactions of *bad*, *mad*, *sad*, or sinfully *glad* when they come. Each person should speak for self and be specific. The facilitator should record comments for all to see. The goal of Game Time is to live what we're learning about mindfulness in Jesus Christ and intentional care for His Body. But it's *not* a time to 'teach' them.

1500-1630: Game Time – organize game(s) for all spouses, children and friends to participate. Games must be safe for all ages, simple, familiar & cooperative but not too competitive (freeze tag, capture the flag, soccer, etc.) Consider using soft or spongy items instead of traditional hard pieces; setting a 'no score' policy and, instead, recognizing godly moments of relationship; emphasizing relationships over rules; and having each host 'award' their spouse, child, or friend with a W.A.I.T. Training T-shirt that appropriately recognizes how they contributed to relational fitness in the Body of Christ.

1630-1800: Family Dinner, Testimony & Prayer – prepare and enjoy a healthy meal together (grilled chicken, vegetable kabobs, salads, fruits, etc. as before) and end with time in small groups (with family and friends) in testimonies and prayer for honoring Christ by building up His Body today.

Helping your group open up and bond

- Exercise near each other and maintain eye contact.

The first goal of W.A.I.T. training is mindfulness: being aware of the interaction of our spirit (beliefs) and body (emotions) in relationships moment by moment. But it might surprise you how difficult closeness and especially eye contact can be, even for mature believers. One of the deepest impacts of sin is a sense of personal shame, and all of us have learned ways to hide: we make jokes, talk a lot, stay busy, act tough or scary, change the subject, etc. But if we're really going to grow in Christ, we have to start with where we really are – including our fears and shame.

Remember, our body is the bridge between our spirit and our relationships. We experience our spirit in emotions and express our spirit by actions – both in relationships. Thus, adding the relational stresses of eye contact and close proximity to one another will reveal our true spirits more intensely. For only when we know our true spirit can we begin to guide and encourage each other in what God's Word declares as *actually* True and Good for His Body. Try some of the following to help your group open up.

○ “When you looked at me your eyes seemed ____ (bad [fearful], mad, sad or glad). What were you thinking?”

○ “I don't want to look at you. I'm angry about something else, and I don't want you to think that I'm mad at you.”

○ “Tell you what. How about it we agree that it's okay for us to laugh, yell, blink, or even cry as long as we talk about what we was going before we go home. We are working toward genuineness in the Body of Christ, aren't we?”

- Use clear *verbal* language & congruent *body* language.

In other words, say what we mean and live what we say in His truth and love - even if we feel bad, mad or sad (note Leviticus 19:17-18, Jesus' reference for the 2nd greatest commandment). See Matthew 5:37, 2 Corinthians 1:17-19, Titus 2:7-8, James 5:12 for more of God's calls to integrity. Yet, few people speak with integrity of body and soul.

A study of 42 schizophrenics revealed that their families used unclear, incongruent communications: *voicing* care but *being* more intrusive, self-deprecating and less supportive than other families. (Journal of Abnormal Psychology, May 1995, Volume 104, No. 2, pp 286-276)

What's the point? People who receive consistently unclear, incongruent messages in relationships meant for intimacy often can't handle the world as they know it and break with reality. Schizophrenics have chaotic cognitive & emotional responsiveness: hearing things, paranoia, disorganized speech, and significant social or occupational dysfunction. God created us to communicate in *integrity, body & soul!*

- Most of us have learned ways to mask what's inside: only revealing our best, using humor, dominating discussions, changing the subject, *doing* for others instead of *being* with them, staying busy, etc. Whether you feel bad, mad, sad or glad, *say* it, *show* it, and ask a brother or sister to *share* it with you so we can *shine* it: God's truth in love.
- If you notice one of your partners is being unclear, ask them to clarify. If their body language is inconsistent with what they're saying, tell them so. But then step up and walk through it *with* them as the Body of Christ.

- Use “I” statements to promote genuineness.
 - “I struggle to stay with you at this pace (or this weight), so I appreciate it when we take time to talk and find a mutually good pace (or weight) to we can work together.”
 - “I want you to push me when I want to give up. But I don’t like to fail, so I don’t know how I’ll react.”
 - “I’ve never been so real. I’m excited and afraid.”
 - “I guess I feel numb because I’ve been judged before, and I don’t want to trust and be hurt again.”
 - “I don’t always know what to say. I’m thankful you give me space but don’t let me stay totally quiet.”
 - “I think that I exercise to feel less _____ (or more _____).”
 - “I’m beginning to be more open to *all* of the messages from my body - encouraging lessons about the Body of Christ and the ugly truths of living in my ‘flesh’.”
- Wait patiently to empower others to speak. If we let silence unnerve us until we fill the gap, we might hinder others’ from noticing the tensions in their bodies or even between us in our relationship. Learn to be quiet and wait for them as an expression of faith and love.
- Use open-ended questions to promote greater safety. These are better than closed questions that only require ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and ‘why’s that put others on the defensive.
 - “From your reading of ‘W.A.I.T. training’, what are you learning about your *modus operandi* in relationships?”

- “How do you see my true spirit peak through when my body is weak (hungry, ill, tired, bored, injured, etc.)?”
- “As my partner, how can you help me grow? And how can I help you – especially when you don’t want help?”
- “What goals of relational fitness and exercise format do we want for our group?” and “How often do we want to check our progress?”
- “When do we want to meet, how long, and how often? How do we want to talk to each other when one of us seems to be quitting or being pushy?”
- “Which of the 24 pictures of the gospel do you personally want to emphasize for your relationships?”
- “What will we see when you’re progressing or avoiding?”
- “As you experience me, when do you see my fear, pride, or faith show through? How do you see this?”
- Talk about apparent beliefs in light of God’s Word.
 - “The knot in my belly seems to tell me that I want to get away. I guess that’s my fear. I want to believe God’s Word (that it’s good to be an interdependent part in the Body of Christ), but I’m nervous about being so close.”
 - “You’ve mentioned that your general outlook on life is – I think you used the word ‘realistic’. That sounds like you’re either regularly sad or angry about things. Is that right? However you’d describe your disposition, what Scripture passages encourage you in what Jesus says about believing and how He calls us to live?”

- “We’ve been exercising for a while, and it seems to me that our group has a critical spirit. I can’t speak for others, but I’m guessing that mine is either fear that you will reject me unless I’m Superman or pride that I’m already Superman. Does anyone have a passage that reminds us of how Jesus calls His Body to interact?”
- “You seem withdrawn, so I’m wondering if I’ve offended you. If so, please tell me so I can take responsibility and we can work on reconciling. Ephesians 4:25ff says to speak truthfully to one another in love for we are all members of the same Body and to be productive. So maybe we can work on our reconciliation by ways that physically help each other right now, such as spotting each other more often during weight lifting.”
- “I know my life isn’t balanced in Christ because I love to live for Him in some things but not in others. What do you see in me that I don’t see? Help me from His Word!”
- “Proverbs 10:19 says, ‘where words are many, sin is not absent’, yet we can’t seem to stop talking. What is that?”
- Verbalize patterns or changes of convictions
 - “Whenever one of us speaks to you lately, your posture seems more ‘open’, and you wait a little longer before responding. What is changing in your beliefs and how?”
 - “When we talk, we seem to look everywhere but at each other. I wonder if we’re avoiding being real.”
 - “I’ve noticed that I always arrive late for aerobics. I also shift my weight side-to-side a lot, but I don’t know why.”

- “Earlier, you scaled your body’s disposition for relationship as a “+2”. Now you say it’s a “+3”. What does that mean, and how did we facilitate that change?”
- “There’s a ‘spirit’ about you when you run. Your face has a slight smile, and your body seems very relaxed.”
- “My stomach and neck get tight when I’m asked to talk, and I often get a headache after I share my heart. It’s like my body doesn’t want to cooperate.”
- “Each of us seems to have an ‘M.O.’ when we don’t make our goals. I’ve noticed I pace a lot and avoid y’all.”
- “The last few times we’ve gone running, you were very talkative but when we play sports you’re quiet. What’s the different between running and sports for you?”
- Challenge deflections and help them refocus. It feels safer to talk about things that don’t require vulnerability: ‘successes’, politics, religion, the past or future, etc. But spiritual gain involves spiritual pain. Voice your feelings and beliefs about your relationships. When others try to avoid real relationship, gently invite them back.
 - “You tell me that you’re doing well, but your tone and energy level is much lower than usual.”
 - “I’ve been complaining a lot, but no one has asked me about it. Who’ll do the hard work to help my spirit?”
 - “All of us ‘signed on’ to work on self-awareness and genuineness in relationships, but we seem to be talking mostly about physical exercise.”

- “Lisa and John just had a quick argument, are we not going to deal with the ‘elephant in the room’?”
- “I asked you to push me more, and I feel like you’re trying to console me instead. What’s going on?”
- “In the beginning, the lyrics of the music seemed to help us meditate. But now it feels like we’re just enjoying the music or using it to avoid more genuine relationships.”
- Validate genuineness with God, self and others.
 - “Thank you for your honesty in love. Weeks ago, I’m not sure you would’ve shared that you were angry with us.”
 - “From what you’ve told us, I think I understand you a little better. Given your past experiences, I might have felt ____ and decided to ____ just as you did.”
 - “You seem much more receptive to others now. When notice your ‘auto-pilot’ now, you remain open and rarely defend yourself, interrupt, or change the subject when we say something that’s difficult to receive.”
 - “Lately, when you begin to stress (breathe faster, flex your muscles, raise the pitch of your voice, etc.), I’ve noticed that you can tell us what’s on your heart but without attacking. This is a big change!”
 - “I enjoy working out with you guys. You’re real enough to say you’re angry or scared and committed to work through these pains together by meditating on Christ and growing in dependence on Him.”
 - “I feel like I can trust you because you tell me the truth.”

- Answer your body with Scripture

- “How hard and long do I have to do this?” A partner could offer, ‘2 Timothy 2 says we’re to be strengthened by the grace in Jesus so we can teach others how and why to suffer like good Soldiers, follow rules like athletes, and enjoy results like farmers.’ Then exercise in ways that express the truths of God’s Word on suffering, results, His Body, etc.
- “Why can’t I just exercise and breathe however I want to?” You could meditate on Ezekiel 37:9-10 to remember that we are dead unless God breathes life into us and Acts 2:14-42 to remember that, yet He uses His children to breathe life into others through the gospel. Then relish each breath as you express both truths and meditate on His continual provision for you and your service to others by His grace.
- “Why does God care about my diet? It’s my body!” Proverbs 25:27-28 calls for self-control, and 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 allows freedom, but both remind us to please God and not just self. Pray for discernment; eat & drink what’s good for you; watch the impact; and do all for His glory.
- “Must I talk? I just want to get buff!” Ephesians 4:15-16 implies that speaking the truth in love (verse 15) must precede the building up of the Body (verse 16), and 1 Corinthians 13:2-3 says ‘moving mountains’ is nothing without speaking in love (see the context on speaking). We must talk to understand each other’s beliefs compared to God’s Word and how our beliefs (true or not) affect our relationships. Then say the truth in love and hear our partners speak in love as each of us seek to express God’s Word in our exercises as physical pictures of the gospel.

- Review what helped (or hindered) growth.
 - “What was most helpful to you today?” or “During our time together, when have you noticed new, biblical convictions growing in you? How did that happen?”
 - “On a scale of 1 to 10 (‘1’ being terrible and ‘10’ being awesome), where would you rate your (or our) self-awareness today? How about genuineness with others?”
 - “Who else noticed Bill being more self-aware & genuine? “What happened next, and how did we respond?”
 - “When did our group seem to be most self-aware and genuine with each other? How did we do that?” or “When were we most ‘dull’ to our true selves and relationships, and how did we avoid being real?”
 - “If you could do our time over again, what choices would you make differently to build up the Body of Christ?”
 - “What word would you use to describe the spiritual ‘vibe’ or relational theme from our time today?”
 - “If you were to begin sabotaging your progress going back to your auto-pilot (desensitizing self or being too busy to be genuine), what could Satan use from today?”
 - “How do you want to take the things you learned and experienced today into the rest of the week? With whom do you want to ‘exercise’ some of your growing pains?”
 - “In our time together today, to what do you believe Jesus would say ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’?”

Using music with W.A.I.T. training

Whether we work alone or play music as background for our group, it could *hinder* our mindfulness. The sense of emotional safety can tempt us simply to enjoy the music, but then we may miss what's deeper within us. Music soothed even King Saul - but only temporarily. (1 Samuel 16:23, 18:10) And as wonderful as the song may be, the vocalist can't interrupt to challenge or encourage us in the moment.

Second, although it is common to use music during cardio workouts, a high heart rate reroutes oxygen to our extremities and away from our brains making it physiologically harder to think. You can check your max heart rate for *mindfulness* by your ability to carry on a real conversation during exercise. For the purposes of W.A.I.T. training, we need to be able to focus on what others are saying and respond genuinely from our spirit. If we can't, we should ease up until we can.

Third, check the lyrics for *Scriptural* accounts of God's character, commands and promises. Some 'christian' songs have great tunes and gripping lyrics but bad theology. We must not relax and let lies pour into our spirits. None of the songs listed on the next page are perfect either, but they do illustrate physical images of spiritual fitness. Guard your hearts (Proverbs 4:13) and take every thought captive to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5). Only His Word is fully reliable.

If you use music, **W**atch your body for subtle responses. **A**ccept what you experience and consider pausing the song to reflect more deeply, but **I**nvest in *Jesus*. Meditate on the biblical truths in the lyrics, express them in exercises and **T**eam with partners in greater depth ASAP. Music can be powerful, but we mustn't use it as a substitute for relationship.

Songs preceded by an asterisk (*) are available as videos from the artist and/or record company on public domain websites such as YouTube.

Balance – Screen door (Rich Mullins), Complete (Kutless), Where joy & sorrow meet (Avalon), *Do everything (Steven Curtis Chapman), *He is with you (Mandisa), *American Dream (Casting Crowns), *Two hands (Jars of Clay), Body and soul (Susan Ashton)

Breath –Oxygen (Avalon), You are my joy (David Crowder), Breathing life (Salvador), Breathe (Michael W. Smith), Every move I make (David Ruis), Breathe on me (FFH), Breath of heaven (Amy Grant), *Breathe your Name (Six Pence None the Richer), *Breathe Your life into me (Red), *Awake and alive (Skillet), *Every time I breathe (Big Daddy Weave), *Keep breathing (Kerrie Roberts), The hurt & the Healer (MercyMe), For the first time – I can breathe (The Afters)

Flexibility – Pierced (Audio Adrenaline), Turn to You (New Breed), *You lift me up (the Afters), Turn around (Matt Maher), *Undo (Rush of Fools), *Come home (Luminate), Whatever (Steven Curtis Chapman), *Turn (Paul Coleman), Opposite way (Leeland), Lord have mercy (Michael Smith)

Form – The way I was made (Chris Tomlin), As it is in heaven (Matt Maher), Control (Royal Tailor), Inside out (Phillips, Craig & Dean), *Two hands (Jars of Clay), *The motions (Matthew West), We live (Superchick), *How you live (Point of Grace), What would life be like (Big Daddy Weave)

Fuel – All along (Remedy Drive), Holy One (Casting Crowns), Mighty to save (Michael W. Smith), Better than drugs (Skillet), *Love addict (Family Force 5), Temporary fills (Mandisa), *Love is here (10th Avenue North), *Sea of faces (Kutless), I wanna be like You (FFH), Only You satisfy (Jami Smith)

Genes – Orphans of God (Avalon), *We were made for You (Aaron Gillespie), Born again (Third Day), All things new (Steven Curtis Chapman), Evolution re-defined (Geoff Moore), Everything glorious (David Crowder), *Children of God (Third Day)

Hunger – Hungry – falling on my knees (Joy Williams), We are Hungry (Jeremy Camp), The Hunger (Fireflight), The hunger stays (Margaret Becker), I wanna be like You (FFH), My heart (Third Day), Wannabe (Royal Tailor), Satisfy (Tenth Avenue North), *Unforgetful You (Jars of Clay), *Prayin' for you (Lecrae), Hunger and thirst (Susan Ashton), Restless (Switchfoot)

Hygiene – Nothing without You (Paul Coleman), East to West (Casting Crowns), Give us clean hands, (Chris Tomlin), Refiner's fire (Brian Doerkson), Lord have mercy (Michael W. Smith), Pure (SuperChick), *Washed by the water, (NeedToBreathe), *Forgiven (Sanctus Real)

Image – Wherever we go & Shine (Newsboys), Beautiful & Crazy (MercyMe), Mirror (Barlow Girl), Masquerade (Across the Sky), *I don't know why (Paul Coleman), *You are more (Tenth Avenue North), *More beautiful you (Johnny Diaz), *Shadowfeet (Brooke Fraser), *Sing me a love song again (Barlow Girl), *Something Beautiful (NeedtoBreathe)

Initiative - *Hands and Feet (Audio Adrenaline), *Does anybody hear her (Casting Crowns), *Make a move (Royal Tailor), *Courageous (Casting Crowns), *I refuse (Josh Wilson), *Until the whole world hears (Casting Crowns), *Fearless (Building 429), Lord, move or move me (FFH)

Instinct – Still listening (Third Day), Jesus speak to me (FFH), Voice of Truth, (Casting Crowns), Why (Big Daddy Weave), Fight (Point of Grace), Voice of a Savior (Mandisa), *Listen to the sound (Building 429), *Renegade (Manafest), *Lifeline (Brooke Fraser)

Maturity – *Never going back to okay (The Afters), *I'm not who I was (Brandon Heath), *In the muthahood (Anita Renfro), How to grow up big and strong (Rich Mullins), Show yourselves to be (Steven Curtis Chapman), Legacy (Nicole Nordemann)

Pain – Pierced (Audio Adrenaline), 40 days (Third Day), Blessings (Laura Story), *Know that you're alive (Kutless), Way I feel (12 Stones),

I still believe (Jeremy Camp), *I'm not alright (Sanctus Real), *I wish (Point of Grace), Cry out to Jesus (Third Day)

Partners – Every man (Casting Crowns), We believe in God (Amy Grant), My generation (Starfield), Other side of the radio (Chris Rice), Soldiers (Out of Eden), Diverse City (TobyMac), Go (Newsboys), We belong together (Steven Curtis Chapman), *What would it be like (Salvador), *We go together like (Urban D and KJ-52)

Rest – Come to Me (Bobby McFerrin), Come one, come all (MercyMe), Free (Shawn McDonald), Smellin' coffee (Chris Rice), Space in between us (Building 429), Come to Jesus (Chris Rice), *While I'm waiting (John Waller), *Come home (Luminate), *Lay my burden (Disciple), You carried me (Building 429)

Reward – Forgiven and Loved (Jimmy Needham), Getting into You (Reliant K), Glorious Day (Casting Crowns), Perfect Day (Josh Bates), Homerun (Geoff Moore), Valley song (Jars of Clay), Run to love (Royal Tailor), *Hard to believe (Vota), *Life is good (Stellar Kart), *Savior Song (Rachel Lampa), *Shackles (Mary, Mary), Medals (Russ Taff)

Sacrifice – Heal the wound (Point of Grace), *Vow (Kutless), Surrender (Joy Williams), *Lose my soul (TobyMac), *Heart to God, Hand to Man (Geoff Moore and the Distance), *40 days (Matt Maher), Give until there's nothing left (Reliant K), *My own little world (Matthew West)

Safety – When you are a Soldier (Steven Curtis Chapman), *Security (Stacy Orrico), *Slow fade (Casting Crowns), *Student driver (Stellar Kart), Strong Tower and *Run (Kutless), Cornerstone (Day of Fire), Get on (Third Day), Bless the broken road (Rascal Flatts), Big enough (Ayiesha Woods), *You love me anyway (Sidewalk Prophets)

Stamina – Life in my day (New Song), Love of the game (Pillar), Whole world knows (Casting Crowns), Hope to carry on (Caedmon's Call), Always (Building 429), Savior, please (Josh Wilson), Hold me together (Royal Tailor), On and on (Chasen), I know I'll make it (Izzi Ray), 7x70 (Chris August), Before the morning (Josh Wilson), *He said (Group1Crew)

Stress – Break me down (10th Avenue North), These days (Mandisa), Magnificent defeat (Wes King), Gravity (Shawn McDonald), Gravity (Royal Tailor), Love me good (Michael W. Smith), *Stronger (Mandisa), *Work (Jars of Clay), *Strong enough (Matthew West)

Training - *Whatever You're doing (Sanctus Real), The Potter's hand (Darlene Zschech), Jesus, speak to me (FFH), Alrightokuhhuhamen (Rich Mullins), As it is in heaven (Matt Maher), For the sake of the call (Steven Curtis Chapman), Give me words to speak (Aaron Shust), *Pride away (Kutless), Show yourselves to be (Steven Curtis Chapman), Take me to your Leader (Newsboys), *The Way (Jeremy Camp)

Tools - *Hands and feet (Audio Adrenaline), If we are the Body (Casting Crowns), The battle belongs to the Lord (Petra), Surrounded (Geoff Moore), Thy Word (Amy Grant), Soldiers (Out of Eden), Workin' on a building (Buddy Green), The things we do (MercyMe), Salt and light (Amy Delaine), *Stand for You (Johnny Diaz)

Vision – *A new Law (Derek Webb), Mountain of God, Show me Your glory, and *Revelation (Third Day), The mountain (Steven C. Chapman), *Daylight (Remedy Drive), *Give me your eyes (Brandon Heath), *Lead me (Sanctus Real), Creed (Third Day and Brandon Heath), Light up the sky (The Afters)

Weight – The one thing (Paul Coleman), How great is our God (Chris Tomlin), Victorious (Mandisa), *He reigns (Newsboys), Great Light of the world (Bebe Norman), Everything I need (Kutless), *Glory defined (Building 429), *Just wanna say (Israel Houghton)

A brief summary and closing thoughts

Those of you with young children are probably familiar with the educational TV series, “Blues Clues”. For a while, it drove me *crazy* that they aired the same episode for five days in a row. The idea was to instill learning through repetition, and it did seem to work with my kids. Hopefully, the many redundancies throughout this book have helped you retain the intended lessons and didn’t drive you crazy. In whatever ways you choose to workout, use your body to help you meditate on the Body of Christ, based on the truths of His Word.

Horizontal motions can remind you of His command to work on relationships around you. When you’re sitting upright on a machine pushing the weight away, you can think about things you need to push away from your life to protect your relationships. When you’re doing seated rows and pulling the weight closer you can meditate on people you want to pull closer in light of God’s promise to build His Kingdom.

You can use up and down motions to remind you of your relationship with God. With each overhead press you can ‘lift up’ a person’s prayer requests to God. During chin-ups (or pull-downs) you can meditate on wanting to pull yourself to heaven with God, and when you’re exhausted praise Jesus that it’s His strength that gets you home.

You can tread water, alternating using only your hands and then using only your feet for strength and endurance. While leaving your feet immobile and sweeping your arms across the surface of the water in big arcing motions, you could pray for relationships as you ‘point’ toward them around you and turn your body to face their homes or your work. While leaving

your arms immobile and doing scissor-kicks to lift yourself up in the water, you can meditate on vertical concerns – things between you and God that you must lift to Him.

Be creative and diligent. But most of all, be faithful to His Word and helpful to His people. The goal is to maintain body and soul by giving every area of our lives to Him. Use every motion to meditate on and illustrate relationships in His Body, based on His Word. So choose exercises and intensities that you can handle with good form. Forget about your repetitions and time, and use the exercise to help you focus on your relationships in Christ.

At the beginning of this book, I suggested that you scale your bodily disposition for relationship from -5 to +5. And I intentionally left this step a little vague in order not to hinder your free expression of thoughts and feelings with your group.

By now, however, I hope that your study of God's Word and exercise of mindfulness has led you to "scale" three specific aspects of relationship: your sense of connection with God through Christ, your sense of connection between your own body and spirit, and your sense of connection with others in the Body of Christ. Otherwise, you may continue to fly on auto-pilot, compartmentalizing your life and trying to cover up behind your latest design of fig leaves.

Years ago, a friend of mine leaned in close to me and with his best dry humor whispered, "Remember, wherever you go - there you are!" It quickly became one of my favorite silly sayings. Recently, however, I heard the same quip being used in a serious sense to call us reflect on its profound truth.

About 3,000 years ago, King Solomon said the same thing this way: “as a man thinketh within himself, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7) The wisest man who ever lived was exhorting us to know the heart where we will find the true self. For wherever we go, we *will* live what we *actually* believe in our *relationships*. What does your body reveal about your relational disposition?

W.A.I.T. training is designed to help us understand and articulate Jesus’ work in us and among us by experiencing and expressing the gospel through relational fitness, body and soul. But there is no mechanical formula to living in Christ. God didn’t accept the Pharisees’ proud offerings, and He won’t accept them from us. (Luke 18:10-14) Even Scripture studies will not bring us spiritual life (John 5:37-40) because it’s not enough to understand ‘concepts’ or to know *about* Jesus.

All born-again believers *know* Jesus (love and follow Him) because He has brought them to eternal life by His Spirit. But we need to long for Him more deeply, speaking and living His truth in His Body whether we feel bad, mad, sad or glad.

Again, 1 John 4:18 may suggest that there are really only two convictions: self-focused fear that distances us from God and each other and love that draws us close. May we slow down enough to be mindful of our M.O.s and W.A.I.T. on Jesus to draw us nearer to each other and to Him in His Body.

Ready? I’m not, but let’s do it together. To paraphrase one of my favorite Christian singers/song writers, life in Jesus Christ is too great an adventure to remain as we are!

A HIGHLY Recommended Reading List

Anger: discovering your spiritual ally, by Andrew Lester (2007, Westminster John Knox Press)

Blame it on the brain? distinguishing chemical imbalances, brain disorders, and disobedience, by Edward T. Welch (1998, P & R)

Desiring God: meditations of a Christian hedonist, by John Piper (1986, Multnomah)

Genesis 1 – 4, a linguistic, literary, and theological commentary, by C. John Collins (2006, P & R) * Note – a very heavy read but an excellent study tool

Grief, Transition and Loss: a pastor's practical guide, by Wayne Oates (1997, Augsburg Fortress)

How should we then live? the rise and decline of western thought and culture, by Francis A. Schaeffer (2009 DVD, familychristianmedia)

On the threshold of hope: opening the door to healing for survivors of sexual abuse, Diane Mandt Langberg (1999, Tyndale Press)

Sacred marriage: what if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy, by Gary Thomas (2000, Zondervan)

Seeing with new eyes: counseling and the human condition through the lens of scripture, by David Powlison (2003, P & R)

Shepherding a child's heart, by Tedd Tripp (1995, Shepherd Press)

Taking on the gods: the task of the pastoral counselor, by Merle R. Jordan (1986, Abingdon Press)

The enduring community: embracing the priority of the Church, by Brian Habig and Les Newsom (2001, Reformed University Press)

The peacemaker: a biblical guide to resolving personal conflict, by Ken Sande (1991, Baker Books)

The return of the prodigal son: a story of homecoming, by Henri J.M. Nouwen (1992, Doubleday)

The war of words: getting to the heart of your communication struggles, by Paul David Tripp (2000, P & R)

TrueFaced - trust God and others with who you really are (experience edition), by Bill Thrall, John Lynch, Bruce McNicol (2003, NavPress)

When people are big and God is small: overcoming peer pressure, co-dependency and the fear of man, by Edward Welch (1997, P & R)

When asked to summarize the Law, Jesus said “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Luke 10:27) Kinda catches everything, huh? That’s because God created every aspect of our being to honor Him by living as whole people in loving relationships. Yet, we tend to compartmentalize life into physical and spiritual pieces. W.A.I.T. training proposes how and why to glorify and enjoy Christ by integrating body and soul for relational fitness.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul described God’s people as Christ’s ‘Building’, His ‘Bride’ and His ‘Body’. This book explores that third image in 24 principles of physical fitness that depict spiritual truths.

In W.A.I.T. training, you’ll find dozens of Scriptures to help you mediate and pray, practical ways to integrate spiritual principles into workouts and relationships, a list of Christian songs that illustrate the principles, example questions and prompts to encourage openness, and more to build up you and fellow believers in His Body.

Think of the book as a gym full of fitness equipment for you and your friends: start where you want; use what you need; and take it at your pace. The pages of the Devotional and Workout Edition are printed in 14 point font and spiral-bound for easier reading while you exercise, as it should fit right on the decks of most cardio machines.

Every moment is an opportunity to invest, so the Apostle Paul tells us to “. . . *train yourself to be godly. 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, emphasis mine)

Bottom Line? God ‘gives birth’ to His Body with everything we need to grow in His grace, but we need to be intentional to see it, say it, and share it to shine it for our joy in Him. (Ephesians 4:3-28) I propose that we do this by creatively exercising body and soul to experience our true hearts and express His true heart in the Body of Christ. Pray outside the box for what’s most helpful for your growth and joy in His Body.