

“Take the Field
Ephesians 4:11-16
Theme: Join the Team
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The Woodside Church

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It is a game for the history books. The Dixie Classic in Dallas, Texas, January 2, 1922. Favored to win were the Centre College Praying Colonels. Yes that was their name. And they must have prayed a lot because they came into the game undefeated at 9-0. Their opponents, the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College Aggies later known as Texas A & M, struggled to a 5-1-2 record. It was a rough game. At the half the score was Colonels 0, Aggies 2. A bigger concern were the number of injured players. So many were sidelined the Aggies feared they wouldn't have enough to finish the game.

At halftime the Aggies coach must have sought divine inspiration. After all, his name was Dana X. Bible. He went up into the stands and told a former player E. King Gill to put on the football uniform of injured player Heine Weir. Gill, climbed underneath the stands and changed clothes with Weir. Then he stood on the sidelines ready to play the whole second half. The Aggies went on to upset the Praying Colonels 22 to 14.

Though Gill never went on the field, he started a tradition at Texas A&M that endures to this day – the 12th Man. At every game the entire student body stands throughout the game to symbolize their "readiness, desire, and enthusiasm" to take the field if needed. Their stadium is "The Home of the 12th Man."

Do you have readiness, desire and enthusiasm to take the field? As the 12th player, the Texas A&M fans support the eleven players on the gridiron with shouts, cheers and chants. Yet when it comes to the Church of Jesus Christ, being a 12th player is not enough. Jesus doesn't want you to stand in the stands. He wants every follower on the field. How do I know this? We have something better than Coach Dana Bible. We have THE Bible as our coach. And in the Bible it says,

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:35-38)

Jesus feels compassion for harassed and helpless people. He says, "Ask Me to send out workers into the field." Like a coach launching his team from the locker room, Jesus sends us to take the field, share Good News and care for hurting people. It's not enough to stand and cheer and chant. It's not enough to put on a suit and helmet. We must leave the stands, leave the sidelines, take the field, get in the game.

To do this, you and I need exercise and training. Today, many people run, bike, and belong to a gym. They work on the outer shell. Yet few exercise the inner spirit. It's

important to keep your body in good shape. But while you work on the outside, don't neglect the inside. Even two thousand years ago Paul, who probably was an athlete, said:

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. (I Timothy 4:8)

Godliness or spiritual exercise is a partner with physical exercise. Spiritual exercise connects you with the God of the universe, heals relationships, helps you in difficult times and fills you with faith, hope and love. Spiritual exercise has this added benefit. We all know the body will wear out. But the spirit continues on. Spiritual exercise prepares you for eternity. It's the only exercise that will improve your life now AND last forever.

Deep inside, we know we need spiritual exercise. A crisis reveals this truth. Seventeen years ago, on the Sunday after September 11th, while we were all reeling from the impact of that terrible holocaust, we instinctively knew what to do. On that day, the churches were full and every game of the National Football League was canceled. Suddenly our priorities came into sharp focus. Over the next weeks, however, many slipped back into their old patterns and stopped their spiritual exercises.

How do you start and stay with your spiritual exercise program? We all need **Coaches**. That's where we come in. We want to help you get spiritually fit. In other words, "ve at Woodside vant to pump you up!" Believe it or not, that's what the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesians.

It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Years ago, my wife urged me to sign up for the gym. I got the T shirt, a key chain tag with my own personal membership ID number, a pen...and still didn't go. Why? I'm too busy. All those machines intimidate me. And so did those muscular body builders – those women could tear me apart. I guess you could say I was being a "girlie-man." Left on my own I would not have gone.

I had one thing in my favor: a wife who loves me and patiently led the way. Being a physical therapist, she took the fear out of those machines by setting up a personal exercise plan. Start slow, stay consistent, build gradually. Too much pain means no gain. Her instructions were clear, written and balanced. Start with the elliptical and then go to the other machines. Work on your arms one day, legs the next.

Jesus gives us coaches to develop our spiritual exercise plans. He provides apostles and prophets – you can read their directions in the Bible. He gave us evangelists. Whoever shared the Good News about Jesus with you is your evangelist: your Sunday School teacher, youth leader, pastor, college roommate, coworker, or a member of your family. Some planted the seed of faith, others nourished it, put sunlight on it. Then Jesus gives you pastors – or shepherds – and teachers. These are the spiritual coaches in your life today. In addition to me there are the staff members of Woodside, the Growth Group leaders, the Sunday School teachers, Adventure Club and youth leaders, the leaders of mission and ministry. Gary Lesslie, a member of Woodside, escaped from Ground Zero

immediately after the planes hit. When I called his home, his wife Helene put Gary on. It was wonderful to hear his voice and know he was safe. He even had enough composure to say, “I guess God still wants me here to see if I can finally get this Junior High Sunday School teaching right.” That’s a shepherd and teacher.

Who are the shepherds and teachers, the spiritual coaches in your life? If it weren’t for my wife’s knowledge, patience and occasional kick in the pants, I would not be going to the gym. But she couldn’t do it for me. One of the greatest fallacies in the Church today is that pastors do the ministry and the people receive the ministry. That is similar to my wife drawing up an entire exercise plan for me and then getting on the machines and doing it while I watch from a comfortable chair – a lazy boy chair. “Keep it up honey! You’re doing great. I can really feel my muscles getting stronger.” The job of the coach is to get you out there to do it. Paul says the same for spiritual coaches: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...” (Ephesians 4:12). Who is coaching you? Who are you coaching? I have a spiritual coach and I coach other pastors and staff members. Every follower of Jesus needs to spiritually coach and be coached.

So what is the spiritual exercise plan? First we **Love God**. Jesus says this is the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38). Paul says the spiritual coaches are: to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13).

For all of us to be pumped up or “built up” we begin by growing closer to God, knowing God personally, loving God completely. Bible scholar Markus Barth translates the first part of verse 13 as, “until we all come to meet the unifying faith and knowledge of the Son of God.”¹ He says the Greek word “come to meet” has a special meaning. It describes citizens coming out to meet a victorious king. Think of the crowds of Jerusalem who cheered at the arrival of Jesus on Palm Sunday. Think of the massive crowds that braved bitter cold February weather to cheer for the victorious Eagles. Those multitudes willingly put everything else aside to show their love and affection for a sports team.

When we worship and pray, we put everything else aside to show our love and affection for the greatest Victor of all: Jesus Christ. Worship is not a spectator sport. Prayer is not just meditation. They are the way we love our Heavenly Father, celebrate our conquering Savior, welcome the power of the Holy Spirit.

When you stick with this spiritual exercise, you receive a wonderful benefit. Paul says you will come to know and love God the Father the way His Son does. My grandchildren stayed over this weekend. I don’t make them call me, The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hogle. They call me Pa. You can know the God of the Universe as your Abba, your Dad. That’s what it means to Love God.

¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6: A New Translation and Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) p. 484.

The second part of your exercise plan is to **Grow in Grace**. Paul goes on:

to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all... *become mature*... (Ephesians 4:12-13)

We still have the marks on the door jamb which chart our children's growth. Yet maturity is more than that. Among other things, maturity involves more discernment and depth. Discernment is knowing how to separate truth from lies and to make wise decisions. Discernment is a matter of the mind. Depth is a matter of the heart. A mature person develops the emotional depth to forgive and make peace, to be content and to offer love, to be humble instead of proud, faithful instead of fearful, gracious instead of grudging.

Nobody develops discernment and depth automatically. In fact, Paul says if we do not grow in grace we will fall victim to clever schemes and temptations of our culture.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4: 14-15).

Imagine a boat filled with babies heading into a hurricane. It's an unthinkable tragedy. And yet when believers surf through the new waves and the latest fads of this culture with barely a Sunday School understanding of the Bible, they are defenseless against the deceitful schemes of those who are trying to drag them away from Jesus.

Earlier this year I asked several leaders of Woodside what is most challenging for you as a Christian. Everyone responded: How do I live **IN** this world as a follower of Jesus and not be **OF** this world? Every day the culture works hard to squeeze you into its mold. But you don't have live like that. God created you for something more. The Bible says, "Don't conform any longer to the schemes and plans of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." God made you to be Different. Starting September 23 we will learn how to think different, be different, make a difference.

If you want to truly grow in grace, you need to be in a Growth Group. Paul says,

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:16)

Growth Groups are the connecting joints in the body of Christ. Just as every vital organ is connected with others through the network of the body, so every individual member must connect with others through a growth group. We need each other to grow. I need my wife to push me to start exercising. The plan was great. But I still didn't go...unless she went. I needed that at first. I often still do. Frankly it's more fun to exercise with someone. We encourage each other and hold each other accountable. Do not pass up the opportunity to

get into a Growth Group with 10 or 12 other believers who will challenge you, stretch you, encourage you, laugh with you and even cry with you as you grow in grace.

Finally, our spiritual exercise plan tells us to **Share with Others**.

to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all ... attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13).

What's the goal of all this spiritual exercise – so we can flex our theological muscles, impress people with our Bible knowledge, brag about our prayer marathons? No. The point of all of this is to become like Jesus, to measure up to being like Christ. What did He do? *He Shared!* He shared the Good News through His preaching, he shared His healing power with the sick, He shared His bread and fed thousands and ultimately He shared His life with us and for us until there wasn't any left. If all we do is sit in worship services and sit in Growth Group meetings and don't share what we receive, we are wasting our time. God wants you to share His love, His care and His Good News in the exact place where He has put you right now.

Do you have a ministry? Do you have a mission? Does your Growth group have a ministry and a mission? Every one of us *can* do this. The question is, "Do you want to do this?" Something changed the day I decided to go to the gym on my own. Going solo is not the point. *Wanting to go* is. I finally discovered the value of exercise. My energy is up. My body feels better. I no longer *have* to do this. Now I *get* to do it.

Spiritual Growth is not just in the mind. All the knowledge in the world will not change you. It is not just in the heart. You can long for something for a long time. It has to come from your will. No one can do for you what you don't want for yourself. This is where the real battle is won or lost. Thankfully, we have an ally on the inside – the Holy Spirit. When you get sick and tired of being sick and tired, when you hit bottom, or when you finally discover there's a deep, personal relationship with the God of the Universe waiting for you, that you can be Different, then you will take the first step. And when you do, the Spirit will help you take the next step and take the field.

My personal plan includes regular spiritual exercises – daily prayer and Bible study, weekly worship and a small group, mentoring and being mentored, tithing and serving in ministry. I didn't do this all at once. I started slow, stayed consistent and gradually built it over time. I don't *have* to do it. I *get* to do it.

One man hears Jesus calling him to get out of the stands and take the field in a special area: high school ministry. Like Jesus, he sees how harassed and helpless they are in this culture. He wants to share with them the Good News of Jesus and give them hope.

There are a lot of things thrown at high school students. So much temptation in this world, so much going on with social media and the internet that you want to talk to them and address it and share all the weaknesses I have because I've fallen many times. It's something I want to do. It's on my heart. I took a leap of faith

last year and signed up to take classes at seminary. I want to continue to learn and challenge my faith. It's a challenge because you want to impact people's hearts.

Who is this? Nick Foles, the Quarterback who won the Super Bowl for the Eagles. When he retires from football he wants to be a youth pastor.

I can't play football forever. I've been blessed with an amazing platform and it's just a door God has opened. I've loved the game of football since I was a kid, I loved playing sports, I loved being part of a team, and I knew as a person that the more growth I've had and the more opportunity I would have to glorify God

Imagine that - everyone dreams of being a Super Bowl winning quarterback like Nick Foles.

What does Nick Foles dream of? Doing what you can do right now:
Sharing Good News and Good Deeds.

It's time to take the field!