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Tapping Blue Jays

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Just the other day, while I was working in my home office, there was a blue jay on my roof, banging away on an unshelled peanut he'd taken from the bird feeder on the back deck. It was the sort of tapping that can't be ignored, especially if you know the damage a jay's beak can do to a wood-shake roof. I had to get up from my desk and scare the bird away.

Tapping blue jays are any distractions that draw us away from what we should be doing. For me, it's the tendency to take the path of least resistance. Though some people regard me as highly motivated and disciplined, I realize such a perception is based on the part of me they see. I know there's another part they can't see ... a part I don't want them to see. It's the part of me that puts off doing things I don't like to do until the last minute. It's the part that avoids things I don't like to do, even when there is a price to be paid for inaction.

Cindy observed this trait during the first few months of our marriage, while students at the University of Texas. After I had dropped a Greek class for the third time, she called me on it. I gave some lame excuse about getting behind because I was sick, but she saw through my cover-up and said, "The truth is, you're a lazy bum."

Looking back, I think she was partially right. I'm not a bum, but I can be lazy--especially when it comes to my spiritual life. Though I'm fairly consistent in the disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, and Scripture memorization, there's another side that resists any work involved in knowing Christ better. By that I mean taking what I learn from the Bible and diligently applying it to my life.

I'm painfully aware the religious leaders who opposed Jesus were well versed in the Old Testament. They took pride in their highly disciplined religious lives. But they didn't know God and hadn't integrated into their lives what they knew from the Scriptures. One of my fears as I approached *The Jesus Experiment* was that my laziness would prevail--that after I started, I would prove to be unwilling to cast aside the delays and distractions, and do the daily work necessary to achieve the desired results.

Breaking Down Barriers

The point of this discussion isn't to identify all the potential barriers to *The Jesus Experiment*. It's to discover how to break them down, whatever they may be for you. For me, it took remembering how I had overcome laziness in the past.

For years, I avoided going to the gym and working out. By the time I reached my early thirties, I was in such bad shape that I could hardly bend over and touch my toes. Years of physical abuse from sports had taken a toll. Forced to choose between further deterioration or getting in shape, I decided to meet with my friend Lance Coffel, owner of the River's Edge Athletic Club.

"I want to get in shape," I told him.

"How committed are you?"

"Totally," I said with all the resolve of an army recruit.

"How much time will you give me?"

I stood tall, puffed out my chest, and said with confidence, "Fifteen minutes, two days a week."

Lance smiled and shook his head in disbelief. He then spent the next hour bringing every muscle in my body, including several I didn't know existed, to the point of total fatigue. When I finally shambled out to my car, my hands were shaking so badly I could hardly get the key into the slot to open the door.

For the next week, my entire body scolded me for abusing it. When the pain finally departed, I realized I faced two options: I would either remain in terrible shape or I would get in shape by committing to working out thirty minutes, three days a week. The first option didn't sound so good, so I chose the better option.

And something unexpected happened--as I worked out, I saw the benefits, and that made me want to work out more. So I upped my workouts to 45 minutes, then an hour. A while later, I added one more day a week to my workout routine. Decades have passed and I've stuck with it.

The pain it took to overcome my laziness illustrates the psychological law of gravity: A person will continue down a path of destructive behavior until the pain of continuing exceeds the pain of changing.

My suffering body convinced me I needed to get in shape. Knowing that not getting in shape was a worse option, I overcame the laziness that had anchored my will and kept me from moving forward.

As I thought about *The Jesus Experiment,* I heard the tapping blue jays reminding me it would require a level of spiritual effort I've often avoided. However, I was at a place in my spiritual journey similar to the day when Lance gave me that first workout. Not that I was out of shape, necessarily.

But I didn't want to stay in the same place, because it wasn't satisfying--it was more painful to remain stagnant than to move forward. I wanted to press on. I wanted to get closer to God and become more like Jesus. I wanted to know the joy of God's transforming work in my life. So I decided I would no longer be held back by tapping blue jays or my resistance to invest the effort needed to live *The Jesus Experiment*. I was all in.

From my upcoming book *"The Jesus Experiment.*