

RICKY VAN PAY, Co-Founder / Lead Coach

ricky@fitpastors.com / [@rickyvanpay](https://twitter.com/rickyvanpay) / rickyvanpay.com



GROWING UP HUSKIE

Hey guys my name is Ricky here's the deal. I grew up in church and cut my teeth on the pews of a church. Growing up I never thought of having discipline with food. When I had a choice I grabbed a burger and fries or pizza. I was always stocky and "husky".

I learned quickly that you don't smoke, you don't drink, and you don't have sex before marriage. I also learned that it was completely ok to stuff my face with as much food and whatever food I wanted that gluttony was OK. I heard people say things like: *"Ah, these old bodies are going to wither away anyway I'll just get to heaven faster"*.

I managed to hang onto my love, love handles that is, from grammar school all through high school. I was very active in all kinds of sports, which helped me from getting any worse. I went on to play a year of college baseball and in Bible college lifted weights now and then, ran a bit, and played softball and basketball to keep the love from growing.

Then I graduated from college, went into full-time ministry, and the inevitable happened. . I had officially stopped being an athlete and stopped paying any attention to my temple and focused every ounce of energy on God's temple. Satan's crafty way to take us ministers out slowly and it's justified right? Exercise is of little value right? The love grew as it did for my fiancé Amy as we got married. You know the drill now with another responsibility less time right... it's now even more unjustified. Then the first child came even more of an excuse to stay at home with the family, stay on the couch, watch T.V., and stuff myself.



UNFIT BEHIND THE PULPIT

I had landed my dream Youth Pastor position at a large influential multi-staffed church. I was constantly on the go doing mission trips, camps, retreats, and leading weekly small groups and services. On my days off I would play golf while eating candy bars and drinking soda. I usually left the course frustrated. Years later found that after a run I never felt frustrated but always rejuvenated and uplifted. I had enough love for everyone, the medium shirts from college became larges, and then I still remember for my birthday someone gave me an XL shirt. I struggled to get out of bed and would sit in the shower for an hour to wake-up with low energy levels, began to snore, and because my "bible-belt" had expanded a few more notches my lower back would ache. I invited you to focus in on the bottom of my shirt to the left.

I started to get embarrassed when any students wanted to go to the pool or when the basketball league started and I would cross my fingers hoping I wasn't on the "skins" team. I remember the gluttony-infested all you can eat staff meetings with sweet ole men bringing in cookies and brownies. I remember the artery clogging feasts we called church potlucks or "fellowship". I remember the all-you-can-eat Italian lunches.

ONGOING AFFAIR WITH ROSA

Perhaps the tipping point all came when I was experiencing a discouraging discontented season of ministry. I knew better than to sneak into a topless bar, head to the casino, go to the pub, so I ran into the arms of Rosa.... Rosa's Mexican Café. I remember it like yesterday going over with some Youth Pastor friends for "Taco Tuesdays". Then when no one knew it I would go later that night in the drive-thru and order a large dinner plate of fajitas with extra tortillas and chips and salsa. You might be thinking what's so wrong about that?

For me I knew it was comfort, I knew I was doing this for deeper reasons. I knew I was hurting and it made me feel better. Down deep I was craving chips and salsa more than Christ. She was my drug addiction and I was sticking my arm with a needle of salsa and sniffing up chips. Bam! I was confronted with my own sin. Rosa had become a secret affair and an idol. I was letting Rosa be my release of pressure and stress from ministry. Instead of fueling my body I was eating to satisfy a craving. My weight was causing a slow growing handicap lifestyle. I know I know you've never done that before right?

As the weeks and months went by that year of 2004, I remember putting on my suit one Sunday morning and barely being able to button my bottom button. At that point I looked in the mirror in disgust and with a wise crack "Dude you're fat!! You need to do something!"



WAKE UP CALL

Later that fall of the same year, my first boy was born and a trigger went off in me to 'be an example of masculinity and not just teach him but participate actively with him'. Shortly after he came I had my annual physical check-up. I hated them not just for the report I'd receive, but having to get naked in front of another guy.... that sucks.

I'll never ever forget what he confronted me with and it was almost like I was waiting for a Nathan to get in my face eye to eye and ask me these questions, "Ricky how old are you?". I answered "26". He went on to ask, "Do you know what your blood pressure is? Do you know how high your cholesterol is? Do you realize you are almost obese at 225 pounds? Then the words I'd been hungry to hear for a long time, "Ricky, you need to do something now and make some changes".

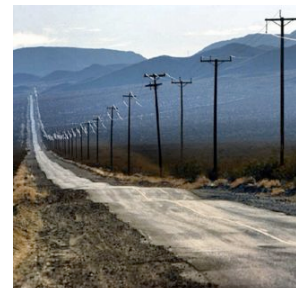
I knew he meant physical and I agreed, but as a Pastor I knew this was more of a spiritual change that needed to be dealt with and then the physical would come. You see our outward appearance is just a mirror for what's really going on inwardly. We all know when we see a pregnant woman what went on in private. We know when we see a teenager outwardly expressing themselves what's going on inside. I believe the majority of the time when we see someone struggling outwardly with their weight, it's probably a disguise for a struggling inwardly. However, I can only speak for myself.

That day as I drove home from the physical it was a wake-up call to move forward. I could have written the words of Paul from 2 Corinthians 5:17 myself that day, "*In Christ I am a brand new creation, **the old has gone and the new has come.***" I looked into my little infant boys eyes that day and knew the example I would become and made a decision then I would stick around as long as I could for him and be physically healthy. I made a decision to no longer squander the most valuable creation God made.... my body.

If he decided to leave Heaven and come get in one and take care of His, I'd better do the same. I also felt convicted being a Pastor preaching to have more self-discipline, confront certain sins, and I neglected the skeleton in my own closet of gluttony. I no longer wanted to lack the credibility with certain kinds of people rather it be those in the health industry, athletes, or soldiers. I made a decision as hard as it would be like Paul to: "***discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.***" 1 Corinthians 9:2

BECOMING A TRIATHLETE

So I got out one cold night shortly after the physical with a goal to run 3 miles and reached one telephone pole, turned around and headed back to the house to grab my bag of Doritos and watched ESPN. O.K. so it was a rough start. However, the next night I would run to the next pole and then walk, then another and so on until over a few weeks I built up to a mile. I still remember not knowing anything about training, shoes, heart-rate, or anything really. I started running with several friends and would eventually run in my first 10K and dropped 20 pounds.



The next year was tough, but I wanted it and wanted it badly. The confrontation from my Doctor and the eyes of my infant son pushed me on. We moved onto Oklahoma and transitioned in ministry and little did I know what was to come. I remember well the nights peddling on a stationary on my in-laws porch, while looking in at them eating dinner. At six o'clock as they would head to a Mexican restaurant, I'd grab an apple and bottled water, and go run laps at the recreation center. I would order salads while friends would order wings. I got a man crush! What? Yes and slapped that image on the back of my closet door as a vision. I signed up and paid a race fee to have a goal with a deadline, and started weighing in every single day and would post my weight on our refrigerator door. Any time I was tempted to open the door and stuff my face I'd ask, "Is this going to help you lower that number tomorrow?"

I'd go on to start swimming and finished my first triathlon in 2006 in which I got "bit by the bug" they say. I'd go on to finish 5K's, 10K's, and a half marathon losing 20 more pounds. The following year I finished my first marathon, century ride, and half-Ironman. It was 2007 that I visited family in Dallas and we all stayed in a hotel. I had already began the transition back into large shirts but finally got back into my mediums. I unloaded two large black trash bags of clothes on the hotel beds. I looked at my brother-in-law and my Dad and confidently said, "*There all yours. You guys feel free to pick out whatever you want.*". My Dad looked up at me and said, "*Son, are you sure you want to do this? These are nice clothes and you might need them again.*" What he didn't realize at that moment is that his son made a decision several years before that I wouldn't need them again.

That same year I got certified as a Personal Trainer with the National Academy of Sports and Medicine. Follow this link to listen to a news interview I did as a trainer in 2007: <http://www.myspace.com/video/vid/21979566>. One of the greatest moments of my weight-loss journey which was spiritual in defeating demons of self-control, discipline, and gluttony.



You might be thinking well that was easy for you. You live in the 2nd fittest city and I live in the most obese. Good, glad you mentioned that because I lost it in one of most obese states, Oklahoma, where people stand in line for carts at the local Walmart. That small town in Oklahoma had no trails, no cycling routes, and I almost got run off the road on my bike as people looked at me like I had leprosy for training.

UNFIT PASTOR TO FIT IRONMAN

On August 31, 2008 I would go on to stamp this journey by hearing the words in Louisville Kentucky "*Ricky Van Pay, You are an Ironman!*". As I hugged my Mom & Amy I wanted to cry but was so dehydrated nothing came. If you'd like to read about that experience look it up on my blog. I had dropped over 80 pounds since the physical check-up. As the years rolled by I have participated in over 20 triathlons including Ironman Louisville, Prairie-Man Half, Branson 70.3, Boulder 70.3, Ironman Coeur d' Alene, and currently training for Ironman Boulder.



FITNESS COACH & CHAPLAIN

Over the years I would have friends and family ask for help in weight loss or training for a race. I spent three years as a Personal Trainer in a well-known health club in Tulsa. I went on to study and receive multiple certifications that you can see below.

Over the course of 2010-2011 I began coaching individuals, pastors, and helping church leaders become fit. We birthed a ministry to the spandex tribe called **Iron One**. It was the fall of 2012 that during extended road trips into the Texas, I heard one pastor after the next ask me, "*Will you help me?*". We came up with three different solutions to help: coaching huddles, wellness programs, and church campaigns. Our mission is to help unfit pastors, leaders, and churches get fit.

As you read from my background I never heard anyone in the church in a small group or from behind a pulpit talk about being physically healthy from a Biblical perspective. I've heard all my life how I need to have stewardship and watch ministers passionately talk about money, but why haven't I ever heard anything about stewarding my body? Why haven't I ever heard a message on the Biblical perspective of physical health. I want to change that.

As I go into this realize I'm by far perfect. I've lost tons of weight, become a fitness coach, finished two Ironmans whatever, but still have bouts with binge-eating and yo-yo dieting. Can I be really honest? I still absolutely love to stuff my face and struggle to not go hit the bottomless pit of pasta when I'm down. There's times when I'll go to Walgreens for the bigger box of nerds or milk duds instead of going into God's presence for a box of healing. When it comes to Paul's verse "I train my body like an athlete" can I be honest? After 3 or 4 miles of running my calves burn, after 20 laps in the pool my eye sockets hurt from my goggles, after 8 reps of lifting my muscles are on fire, and after 20 miles on a banana seat well everything hurts. Isn't it ironic though that as we go harder and deeper into scripture it's painful. In order to grow and be healthy it involves sacrifice and the willingness to endure.

During this journey of spending time in health clubs as a trainer, having training partners, and getting involved in the triathlon tribe it allowed me opportunities to pastor people that don't have one, but need one. In 2011 we moved to the Mecca of triathlon, Boulder Colorado and have become the first endorsed U.S. Missionary Chaplains to triathletes under the Assemblies of God. We birthed a ministry to the spandex tribe called **Iron One**. We help fund this by coaching through **Fit Pastors.com**

COACHING CERTIFICATIONS

NASM Certified Personal Trainer, Corrective Exercise Specialist, Fitness Nutrition Specialist
USAT Certified Level 1 Triathlon Coach
USA Certified Level 1 Swimming Coach
ASCA Level 1 Swimming Coach
USA Certified Level 3 Cycling Coach
RRCA Certified Running Coach

