

Christian Coaching Distinctives

The Universality of Coaching

Deep into a soothing yoga stretch, I listened to the instructor's intriguing questions that whittled their way into my consciousness. My workouts, more often for strength, have opened the way for all kinds of allegories for inner life and soul exercises. One question she asked took a seat and looked me in the eye.

What do you intend?

The stretching of sinew with release of tension ushered in a stretching of imagination with release of curiosity. There was calm and lure in the space she created as I held the uncomfortably comfortable pose.

I recognize there is a universal draw to understand and grow; to intend. Most world views hold to these as worthy human endeavors. Some cultures or philosophies of life keep them in tight check.

So, is there much difference between coaching and Christian coaching? The exercise instructor was not overtly Christian, yet the practice took me to a deep place.

Is there much difference between a coach who is Christian contrasted with a coach who implements Christian meaning and follow-up into his/her practice? I would say there can be some overlap of the Venn Diagram type. There can be times for different approaches as in situational leadership.

Since personal development, recovery tools, work/life balance, slowing, meditation, etc. are popular themes these days, it is possible to find any degree of Christian-ness in addressing these. Different approaches meet the varying levels of commitment and degrees of need.

I do propose, that in the realm of the inner workings of the Christ-following life, a Christian coach must bring in rigorous Biblical exercise.

The Art of Grace AND Truth in Inner Life Coaching

It's easy to fall toward one or the other; grace or truth exclusively. Highlighting love, affirmation, care, and comfort, while leaving out the messy discomfort where growth and stretching most often happen. Or honing in on only the honest, straight-up reality of stuff you need to face and change; neither stream in itself being very compelling.

We are such fragile beings yet in dire need of change and growth. How do we get to growth and help others get there through coaching? I've found many likenesses in the secular coaching world to Christian themes of

- meditation (Psalm 19:14)
- mindfulness (Psalm 8:4; 2 Peter 3:2.)
- truth setting us free (John 8:32)
- connecting with higher power (Ephesians 1:19)
- transcending the self (Romans 8:37)
- slowing (Psalm 46:10)
- setting aside old and putting on new (Ephesians 4:22-24).

So, what's the difference between what they're saying or techniques they're using and what we as followers of Christ say and do?

Well, all truth is God's truth so no wonder they find some of the practices to be useful and effective! God causes the sun to shine on the righteous and the unrighteous. However, if we want to get to deeper places of transformation our distinction will be that we are co-laborers with God, like the apostle Paul striving with His power working in us toward people's growth and maturity. (Colossians 1:29) The Spirit's leading and power, discernment and guidance into the truth is what sets us free. Getting to those places can be a long and arduous road.

I have worked for years on wading through my own story and then on crafting and guiding small groups and individuals in "*journey coaching*". I have found some similarities in the things I do to other methods. After establishing my own unique angle of this kind of coaching I came across an example of something similar. Dr. David Drake's Narrative Coaching is a wonderful foray into a client's story because "stories make visible the largely invisible narrative processes that drive their life." He speaks of revisiting moments of identity definition that have plagued the person, in order to reset and reinterpret into a desired outcome. He talks of triggers, core values, unmet needs and reactive responses. These are things we all face and need help with. I think his is a brilliant depiction of using human psychology and science to raise awareness of one's inner world and meet inner needs for change. We can all be helped by that.

The connection between our stories and our present shows itself in this kind of exploration. And God is all about that. He asks us to examine our ways, to ponder the path of our feet, to watch ourselves and our souls diligently. Working with God on our difficult influences and early formations is part of naming an old self that, left untouched, leads to growing logs in our eyes that keep us from seeing and *keep us from intending*. The distinction I see in this kind of coaching would be the power of His all-encompassing love and presence even in former impactful moments of grief, pain and sorrow. The depth of His personal, intimate love opens us to hear, see, be honest and turn to what's true! This is a start.

The pathways in our brains default to old ways, so we need renewal of mind, often, to a new self. So, a distinction for Christian coaching here is an ongoing need to set the mind on His Spirit to strengthen, renew, redirect and persevere. This takes tools, creativity, encouragement, reminders and some good practice (Hebrews 5:14). This is a ripe place for a coach to come alongside a fellow journeyer to co-create helpful paths toward transformation, not unlike recovery tools that carve new paths in a jungle of worn-down ones to blaze a trail in a new direction.

Dallas Willard, spiritual formation guru, says "Grace is not opposed to effort it is opposed to earning."

Perhaps another distinctive is that we as Christian coaches take seriously our own need for continuing transformation that conforms us to the image of Christ in

- the way He loved in the face of opposition, trauma and rejection;
- the way He kindly upheld Truth over man's traditions when it was quite unpopular and dismissed as irrelevant
- the way He battled the enemy of His soul
- answering thoughtfully the explorative questions that He asks.

As Dr. Ruth H. Barton says, "Truly, the best thing any of us has to bring to leadership is our own transforming selves."

"Transformation is at once a task and a grace. Unless I work on myself, divine grace cannot become fruitful, and without divine grace my work is in vain." Richard Rohr

So, we encounter truth, and embalmed with His grace we can receive it and enter into new ways of thinking, being and doing.

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