

CHRISTIAN COACHING

SECOND EDITION

Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality

CHRISTIAN COACHING

GARY R. COLLINS, PHD

NAVPRESS 



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PREFACE

FORTY YEARS AGO, almost to the day, I published my first book. *Search for Reality: Psychology and the Christian* was a 209-page introduction to psychology and how it related to the Bible and to the work of the church. It was priced at \$1.95.

All of my life I have been an avid reader, and for most of that time I have been a writer. I never expected to publish anything, so I was surprised when a publisher accepted my first manuscript and then asked for another book. I've been writing books, articles, and newsletters ever since. Most often I write material that is new, but sometimes I have the opportunity to take an earlier book and produce a revised edition. From my perspective, a revision is not a quick tweaking of the previous edition. A revision involves a complete reevaluation of the earlier manuscript, an updating of the endnotes, a re-writing of many of the sentences, usually an adding of new chapters, and a reexamination of the original book's basic ideas. The book that you hold in your hands builds on the first edition and carries over some of the same ideas, but in many ways this is a completely new book—updated, expanded, revised, and more practical than the book that came before.

One thing that has not changed over the years is my appreciation for the encouragement, insights, and prayers of so many people who have come along with me as I have worked on various writing projects. It is risky to list names. The possibility always exists that somebody will be left out by mistake. But I am willing to take the risk and express my appreciation to a number of people who helped make this book better than it would have been without their support.

My wife, Julie, tops the list. For many years she has been my closest friend and my greatest encourager. I am incredibly grateful for her love, patience, and cheerful willingness to do life together and to walk alongside me as I have written year after year.

In addition, my appreciation goes to the following friends. I have thanked them all personally, but for the record, I want everyone who reads these words to know that these people have made major contributions to this book. They know who they are, but they may not know how much they have helped. Thanks to Jean-Christophe Bieselaar, Jan Collins, Jon Ebert, Marcel Henderson, Tina Stoltzfus Horst, Fran LaMattina, Lynn and Robin McAlister, Christopher McCluskey, Josh McGinnis, Linda Miller, Krzysztof Pawlusiów, Mike Ronsisvalle, Judy Santos, Caleb Seeling, Tia Stauffer, Lisa Steiner, Tony Stoltzfus, Christopher Watson, Susan Britton Whitcomb, Jeff Williams, Erik Wolgemuth, and Gary Wood.

Above all others, I am grateful to God, who has given me the health, life, abilities, creativity, and motivation to keep moving forward. To God be the glory.

PART 1

**THE
FOUNDATIONS OF
CHRISTIAN COACHING**

WHAT IS COACHING?

PLAYA TAMBOR IS a remote resort, a short flight north of San Jose on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. Only my wife knew why I wanted to go there for my birthday. It was a comfortable vacation spot, but, more important, it was isolated and hundreds of miles away from telephone calls, birthday cards, or friends who might be inclined to throw a party. I was about to turn sixty and didn't want to face this new milestone in my life.

First morning there, I went off to the beach lugging a 670-page book by Betty Friedan, who had written about her own encounters with the later years. I connected with the first words immediately:

When my friends threw a surprise party on my sixtieth birthday, I could have killed them all. Their toasts seemed hostile, insisting as they did that I publicly acknowledge reaching sixty, pushing me out of life, as it seemed, out of the race. Professionally, politically, personally, sexually. Distancing me from their fifty-, forty-, thirty-year-old selves. Even my own kids, though they loved me, seemed determined to be parts of the torture. I was almost taunting in my response, assuring my friends that they, too, would soon be sixty if they lived long enough. But I was depressed for weeks after that birthday party, felt removed from them all. I could not face being sixty.¹

I never finished the book, but I mentioned it to a friend when we got home. George Callendine was a former student who had become a consultant to business and church leaders. I accepted eagerly when he offered to take me through the process that he used to help his clients move through transitions and get their

lives and careers back on track. This was the birthday present I needed most.

Over a period of months, we looked at my spiritual gifts, abilities, and interests. We sent questionnaires to the people who knew me best and got their perspectives. With my friend's gentle guidance, I looked honestly at my goals, career, place in life, values, passions, style of work, and hopes for the future. I'm sure we discussed my concerns about aging and the irrational fears that my younger friends—the ones who keep me creative and challenged—might turn away from me in my old age. For weeks, I struggled to write a mission statement that could clarify my life purpose and be a filter to guide my decisions and activities in the coming years. In all of this, my friend never made demands, gave advice, or told me what to do. Gently he pushed my thinking in new directions, helped me narrow my goals for the future, and kept my focus on what God might want for the remainder of my life. Sometimes he prodded me to consider issues I wanted to avoid. When I set goals, he kept me accountable for reaching them. If I told him about some vague dream for the future, he asked questions to help me clarify what I meant. Throughout it all, George never stopped giving encouragement. My friend was not counseling me. He was not doing consulting. I can see now that I was being *coached*.

THE MEANING OF COACHING

In the 1500s, the word *coach* described a horse-drawn vehicle that would get people from where they were to where they wanted to be. Many years later, big buses with rows of seats also were called coaches, and their purpose was the same: to get the people to where they wanted to go. Some writers have suggested that the goal was similar in the ancient athletic world, where coaches helped gifted athletes and teams boost their performance and get to the goal of winning in the Olympic Games.² Others suggest that it was not until the 1880s that the word *coach* was given an athletic meaning, when it was used to identify the person who tutored university students in their rowing on the Cam River in Cambridge. Whatever its origins, the word stuck and coaches became known as people who help athletes move from one place to another. Over time, the word also became associated with musicians, public speakers, and actors who rely on coaches to improve their skills, overcome obstacles, remain focused, and get to where they want to be. Former Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula writes about the athletes who would come to his team with their skills and talents, ready to submit to the coach whose job was to instruct, discipline, and inspire them to do things better than they thought they could do on their own.³ The coach leaves each person being

coached with increased self-confidence, clearer direction, and greater fulfillment than he or she would have had otherwise.

Coaching might have stayed in the realm of sports and entertainment had it not moved into the corporate world a few decades ago. Faced with the unsettling impact of galloping change, rapid technological advances, and tidal waves of information glut, business leaders began to see that no one person could keep abreast of everything. Micromanaging went out of style. The CEO could no longer manage from the top, keep aware of everything that was going on, and have the ability to tell everyone what to do. Experienced business executives with leadership gifts and management skills were faced with people issues such as communication and relationship breakdowns, high levels of turnover and absenteeism, and low levels of productivity, motivation, and commitment. In companies large and small, people at all levels had to learn how to deal with change, develop new management styles, make wise decisions, and become more effective, all while they coped with their hyperactive lifestyles and increasing stress. Some wanted help with their own life planning and life management issues. There was a need to train workers to think and behave like leaders and decision makers. CEOs and other executives wanted people to guide them into this new world, like my young friend coached me through the transition into my sixties. The coaching principles that athletes and performers had used for years emerged in the business community. Personal coaching moved beyond health clubs to corporate offices and the workplace. According to *Fortune* magazine, coaching became the “hottest thing in management.”⁴

A coach is someone trained and devoted to guiding others into increased competence, commitment, and confidence.

— FREDERIC HUDSON, author of *Handbook of Coaching*

Although the modern coaching movement got its start and had its earliest growth in the management world, today it is hot everywhere except in the church. People are turning to nutritional coaches, fitness coaches, financial coaches, public-speaking coaches, and what have become known as life coaches who help others find focus and direction for their lives and careers. Some people look for marriage coaches, parenting coaches, coaches for their spiritual journeys, time-management coaches, and coaches to help them through life transitions. All of these coaches come alongside to guide people through life's challenges and help them move forward with confidence in the midst of change.

Since the 1990s, the field of coaching has grown significantly. The International Coach Federation (ICF) was founded by a few people in 1992, but with its expansion to thousands of members in approximately ninety countries, ICF is now “the largest worldwide resource for business and personal coaches.”⁵ Today there are numerous coaching organizations, including the popular Coachville, the Association for Coaching based in Great Britain, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), and Christian organizations, including the Christian Coaches Network. Only a handful of training programs existed in the late 1990s, but one report estimates that more than 300 exist today.⁶ Over sixty groups have begun programs to certify coaches, and a number of universities and graduate schools now offer courses and degree programs in coaching. One book has called all of this a “coaching revolution.”⁷ It is a revolution that shows no signs of slowing down.

Despite this growth and exploding popularity, coaching still draws puzzled stares from people who have never heard of its existence. The coaching books in my library all have definitions, some of which are long and more confusing than enlightening. At its core, coaching equips people to move from where they are toward the greater competence and fulfillment they desire. Stated concisely, *coaching is the art and practice of enabling individuals and groups to move from where they are to where they want to be*. Coaching helps people expand their visions, build their confidence, unlock their potential, increase their skills, and take practical steps toward their goals. Unlike counseling or therapy, coaching is less threatening, less concerned about problem solving, and more inclined to help people reach their potentials.

In the future, people who are not coaches
will not be promoted.

— JACK WELCH, former chairman and CEO of General Electric

Coaching is not for those who need therapy to overcome disruptive painful influences from the past; it is for relatively well-adjusted people to build vision and move forward toward the future. Coaching is not reactive looking back; it is proactive looking ahead. It is not about healing; it's about growing. It focuses less on overcoming weaknesses and more on building skills and strengths. Usually coaching is less formal than the therapist-patient relationship and more of a partnership between two equals, one of whom has skills, experiences, or perspectives that can be useful to the other.

HOW DOES COACHING DIFFER FROM COUNSELING?

Counselors help people deal with problems such as depression, anxiety, inner turmoil, and conflicts with others. Some people come for counseling because of their grief, guilt, insecurities, feelings of failure, or inability to control their anger, addictions, or sexual struggles. Issues such as these imply that something in life is wrong, missing, or needing to be fixed. These are topics that mental health counselors and researchers have studied for many years. They are issues that have dominated the work and writing of pastoral counselors. All of these topics relate to what has come to be known as *negative psychology*. The goal in most cases is to bring counselees from their negative experiences and difficulties into a place in which they are well functioning, better able to cope, and living lives that are more positive and not plagued by problems.

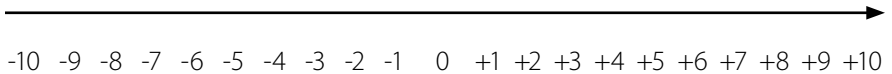
Because these problems differ in their severity and intensity, it can be helpful to put them on an imaginary scale from -1 to -10, with -10 being the worst. For example, a marriage problem might not be very serious or disruptive (-2 or -3), or it might be dominated by intense conflict including violence (-9 or -10). Counselors are skilled in understanding and helping people overcome the issues of negative psychology regardless of the severity. Christian counselors work as servants of Christ, helping others deal with the causes of their distress, get free of the symptoms, find inner peace, and experience mental and spiritual healing. The goal is to bring people to the zero point on the scale. This represents stability.

At the end of the twentieth century, a few secular psychologists and professional counselors began to speak and write about something known as *positive psychology*. These writers argued that traditional psychology has focused too much on the negative issues in life and ignored more positive issues, such as hope, creativity, optimism, courage, responsibility, forgiveness, and other issues that make life worth living. According to the founder of this new movement, positive psychology aims to change the focus of psychology “from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities.”⁸ Within only a few years, positive psychology has grown significantly in its influence, popularity, and research support. The founders show no awareness of Galatians 5:22-23 and there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in their writings, but these psychologists appear to be discovering many of the traits that Christians know as the fruit of the Spirit.

Positive qualities also can be put on an imaginary scale in which the characteristics are ranked from +1 to +10, with +10 being the most desirable and positive. Many of us have careers, marriages, spiritual lives, or sexual

experiences that we would rate at +1 or +2. There are no major problems and there does not appear to be any need for counseling, but nor is there a sense of deep fulfillment and satisfaction. A person might view his or her work at +2, for example, but long to have meaningful and significant work that could be rated at a +8 or +9.

Whereas counseling deals with negative psychology and helps people move from their problem areas to a point of stability, coaching deals with positive psychology and helps people move to higher levels of fulfillment. Counseling focuses on problems and frequently considers the past. Coaching focuses on possibilities and looks at where people want to go in the future. The Christian coach’s work is to meet people on the following scale and move them further along in the direction of the arrow.



COUNSELING	COACHING
<i>Negative Psychology</i>	<i>Positive Psychology</i>
Focuses on problems, dealing with conflicts, insecurities, spiritual struggles, and emotional issues such as depression, anxiety, and anger	Focuses on finding fulfillment, enhanced performance, team building, vision casting, career growth, and reaching one’s goals and dreams
Fixes what is wrong	Enables people to reach their goals
Focuses on the causes of problems that arise from the past and on bringing healing and stability	Focuses on the present and future, possibilities, reaching goals, getting unstuck, and turning dreams into reality
The counselor is the expert who treats patients, provides healing, and directs	The coach and client are coequals who work together to bring change.
Usually done by people with expertise in psychology, psychopathology, and therapeutic skills	The best coaching is done by people with training in such coaching skills as listening, questions, and encouraging

WHAT ABOUT MENTORING, DISCIPLING, AND CONSULTING?

Recently I got an e-mail suggesting that “the term *coaching* is the going word for the personal mentoring movement” and that “one-on-one discipleship [is] not very far apart from Christian coaching, except perhaps the terminology.” The writer suggested that we drop the word *coaching* and use the word *discipling* instead. Others have suggested that coaching is a new word for *consulting* and that any of these words might be replaced with such terms as modeling, spiritual guidance, soul care, or brief-strategic therapy.

A young pastor suggested still another term during one of our weekly breakfast meetings. “I don’t need a father,” my friend said. “I have a good dad. I don’t need a counselor, but if I wanted one I would know where to turn. More than anything else, I need somebody to journey with, somebody who has walked the road of life a little longer than I have. I want to be able to come alongside you for an hour or so every week, to talk about life, learn from your experiences, and have you help me avoid some of the potholes on the road.” From that point, we called our meetings *journeying* times.

Does it matter what term we use? Certainly coaching overlaps with consulting, mentoring, and discipleship. They all involve a relationship in which at least one person is further along in the journey of life and willing to guide others, often as a trusted role model. All of these terms involve accountability, encouragement, and a commitment to growth. Despite the overlap, however, this book assumes that coaching is a unique process involving skills and assumptions that differ from the other specialties.

Consulting and coaching. In many ways, coaching seems very similar to the consulting that has become popular in business and some church circles in recent years. Usually consultants are paid to analyze a situation and give expert guidance and advice. We once attended a church that had grown beyond its capacity but had no place to expand. A paid consultant was hired to analyze our situation and give suggestions about what we should do. He talked to the church leaders, gave a detailed questionnaire to the congregation, looked carefully at the community, and then gave his analysis and recommendations in return for his consulting fee. Often we need experts like this. If you are sick, you go to a doctor for a consultation about your physical condition and its treatment. In business, a consultant might analyze existing problems and practices, suggest better marketing and business strategies, and help companies improve performance and develop future plans. The consultant is an expert who analyzes and makes recommendations.

In contrast to the emphasis on imparting information through tutoring and instruction, coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize his or her own performance.

— adapted from SIR JOHN WHITMORE, author of *Coaching for Performance*

In contrast, coaching is much more focused on the individual or group being coached, stimulating these people to make their own judgments and decisions. Coaching does not involve making a diagnosis or giving advice. A coach does not need to be an expert in the areas that concern those being coached. Instead, the coach needs an ability to listen, understand, ask insightful questions, summarize what is being said, and guide as nondirectively as possible while a person looks at his or her own situation, reaches conclusions about what to do, and then takes action. In this process, the coach is an encourager, cheerleader, challenger, and accountability partner, but the coach is not there to give expert advice or direction.

Mentoring and coaching. In his book on mentoring, Ted Engstrom defines a mentor as someone who “provides modeling, close supervision on special projects, and individualized help” that includes encouragement, correction, confrontation, and accountability.⁹ According to Engstrom, a mentor is an authority in his or her field as a result of disciplined study and experience. This person is willing to commit time and emotional energy to a relationship that guides an understudy's growth and development.

The idea of mentoring apparently came from Homer's *Odyssey*, in which King Odysseus went to war, leaving his household and young son, Telemachus, in the care of a wise and proven teacher named Mentor. Clearly the king was not in a great hurry to get home, as he was gone for twenty-one years, but when he returned he found that the young prince had become a competent leader and man of integrity, molded by the example, guidance, and wisdom of Mentor. For centuries, the concept of apprenticeship meant something similar: the guidance of an older, more experienced person passing knowledge and teaching skills to one who is less experienced and most often younger.

Although mentoring has become popular among Christians in recent years, its modern popularity arose in the business world, where more established and successful leaders took on the task of guiding protégés in their professional growth. When I began my teaching career as a young professor fresh out of graduate school, a more senior faculty member took me under her wing and gently guided me in the ways of academia. We never used the term,

but she was a mentor, helping me become more proficient in my profession and career.

Mentoring still takes place in many work settings, but it is fading in popularity. According to a professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, mentoring systems have largely failed. There is no time for this in organizations that are lean and focused on the pressures of change management and strategic planning. People are paid for what they produce, not for the time they spend developing others. As a result, executives and managers are looking for coaches outside their companies and vocations.¹⁰

A mentor is a more senior individual who imparts what God has given (wisdom, opportunities, and counsel) to a more junior person. In the same situation, the coach is building the client's decision-making ability by asking him to think things through in a structured way. A coach draws out the abilities God has put in someone else. . . . When I'm mentoring, I'm teaching a person, letting him draw from me or learn from my experience. When I'm coaching, I'm pushing a person to draw from his or her own resources and experiences. Coaching is helping people learn instead of teaching them.

—TONY STOLTZFUS, author of *Leadership Coaching*

Coaching certainly deals with career issues, but often the focus tends to be broader. Whereas mentors may exemplify and share expert knowledge about vocational or spiritual issues, coaches do not claim to bring expertise or special knowledge about the client's area of interest. Coaches stand alongside the people who are coached, helping them envision their future directions, guiding as they formulate their goals, and encouraging them to take action steps. Coaches avoid giving advice or specific suggestions. By their example and skilled questioning, coaches encourage, challenge, and motivate others to clarify their own life directions, to gain confidence and commitment, and to move forward to the place where they want to be. Over the years, mentoring has broadened to look more and more like coaching. A major difference, however, is that the mentor works as an expert, while the coach assumes that the client¹¹ is the one best able and most likely to find direction and move forward.

Counseling or therapy deals mostly with a person's past and trauma and seeks healing.

Consulting deals mostly with problems and seeks to provide information, expertise, advice, strategies, and methodologies to solve them.

Mentoring deals mostly with succession training and seeks to help someone do what the mentor does.

Coaching deals mostly with a person's present and seeks to guide him or her into a more desirable future.

—PATRICK WILLIAMS and DIANE S. MENENDEZ,
Institute for Life Coach Training

Discipleship and coaching. Discipleship is more focused than either mentoring or coaching. Discipleship centers on teaching biblical truth and spiritual disciplines to newer or less mature believers. There are different ways of approaching the discipleship task, but often there are set courses of study, a more limited time frame, and a teacher-student type of relationship.

Earlier I mentioned a note that came to me from a Christian leader who argued that *Christian coaching* and *discipleship* are two terms that mean pretty much the same thing. In response I acknowledged that there may be similarities but that unlike discipleship, coaching is not *primarily* about helping people grow spiritually, even though that may be a part of some coaching. In contrast, coaching is about career development, getting unstuck, developing and reaching corporate and personal goals, managing conflict, getting through life transitions, clarifying visions, and building better relationships. I do not see those as the main goals of discipleship.

I doubt there are many (if any) people in the Christian coaching movement who would say that Christian coaching is the same as personal/practical discipling. Coaching represents a set of skills and techniques that can be used effectively to help accomplish the goals of discipleship, but the skills of coaching are used more broadly than the focused goal of building mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship deals mostly with spiritual development and seeks to give instruction and guidance that will enable individuals to grow in Christlikeness and in the knowledge and favor of Jesus Christ.

WHAT MAKES COACHING POPULAR?

I have a friend who is an outstanding therapist. His counseling practice is thriving. He teaches doctoral students at a local university, supervises their training, and reads a lot of psychological journals. He has read the first edition of this book, attended some of my lectures on coaching, and even invited me to address his classes. But my friend is very skeptical about coaching. He has an open mind and a gracious attitude, but he wonders if coaching is really a form of counseling being done by people without professional training in therapy. He questions whether coaches are effective, doubts that coaching really is a profession, has concerns about the lack of regulation in the coaching field, and tends to think that coaching is a fad that will fade.

My counseling colleague is not alone in his skepticism. Many coaches recognize that his concerns are legitimate, so each issue is being addressed by academic researchers, analyzed in professional journals, and looked at carefully by businesspeople unlikely to keep putting money into coaching for their employees or executives if there is not a high return on the company investment. Churches and parachurch organizations are putting resources into coaching for pastors, and coach training for small-group leaders, board members, and mission executives. Increasingly sophisticated training and practice is developing in specialty areas such as career coaching, executive coaching, and two areas that will get special attention in the following pages, personal life coaching and leadership coaching. Granted, there are too many certification programs, but the International Coach Federation and other groups are setting rigorous standards that many independent groups are seeking to emulate and surpass. Carefully developed standards of coaching ethics have been formulated, and it seems likely that eventually coaching will be regulated like the established professions. As these trends continue, many coaches are finding that potential clients may have limited interest in a coach's certification but do want to know where the coach has been trained and what evidence exists that the coach has been successful with other clients. *U.S. News & World Report* listed coaching

as one of the top ten growing professions and as the second biggest consulting business, second only to management consulting.¹² The coaching revolution that we mentioned earlier clearly is continuing.¹³

WHAT MAKES COACHING CHRISTIAN?

My first introduction to Christian coaching came from a counselor named Christopher McCluskey. In the early part of his career, he worked as a therapist in private practice, but often he saw people in his office who didn't really want or need a counselor. They were not in a state of crisis or struggling with seemingly unsolvable problems, but they had a distinct feeling that something was missing from their lives. They wanted help from someone who was objective, confidential, a skilled listener, and able to give them honest feedback. They wanted a guide to help them find greater peace and joy in their Christian lives. These people were looking for a life coach.¹⁴

McCluskey took a bold step. After training to be a coach, he closed his counseling practice in Florida, moved his family to a farm in Missouri, wrote a letter to his clients and colleagues explaining his move, and began coaching people using the telephone, fax machine, and e-mail. Today he works as part of the field of Christian coaching, which we will describe later in this book. For Chris McCluskey, coaching is more than his area of work. It's his ministry. It is a way of helping people find God's vision for their lives and learn to live accordingly.

Training programs, books, and professional articles on coaching often mention values and sometimes refer to spirituality. Most often, however, these resources and training materials are for the secular market without reference to anything Christian. It is not unusual to find comments about New Age or Eastern spirituality. In some coaching courses, there is reference to "what the universe has decided" or "what the universe arranges," seemingly in an effort to avoid using the name of God or acknowledging his existence. Despite these trends and the fact that coaching still is new to much of the Christian community, it could be argued that coaching was at the core of how Jesus related to people throughout his ministry.¹⁵

Jesus came to point people to the Father and show how we could have life everlasting and lives that are more full and abundant.¹⁶ The Christian coach helps people imagine ways in which their lives can be better. The coach walks alongside as people make changes that will improve their careers, their families, their journeys with God, and their world. Like all other coaches, the coach helps people get from where they are to where they want to be.

But Christian coaching has a greater, nobler, and more eternal purpose. At its core, *Christian coaching is the practice of guiding and enabling individuals or groups to move from where they are to where God wants them to be.* Human goals, dreams, aspirations, and gifts are not discounted, as these often come from God. But Christian coaches encourage others to find God’s vision for their lives and to move from following their own agendas to pursuing God’s purposes.¹⁷

In his book *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Rick Warren writes about surfers in the ocean near his home. No ever tries to build a wave; instead, “surfing is the art of riding waves that God builds. God makes the waves; surfers just ride them. . . . When surfers see a good wave, they make the most of it, even if that means surfing in the middle of a storm. . . . Our job as church leaders, like experienced surfers, is to recognize a wave of God’s Spirit and ride it.”¹⁸ This also is the job of Christian coaches. They seek to help people discern what God is doing in the world and in their lives. The coach comes alongside individuals or groups and helps them find their calling as a part of God’s divine agenda, riding the waves that he is building.

How do Christian coaches help people see where God is moving or what he is blessing and then catch those waves? By asking thought-provoking and powerful questions, coaches assist their clients to become sensitive to the forces shaping the times in which we live. Coaching enables people to be aware of what God appears to be doing in their communities, churches, and individual lives. Through coaching, individuals or organizations can recognize the gifts and opportunities God has given to them. Christian coaches anchor themselves in basic Christian values and beliefs. They take time to know God better and to listen for his voice. Like the noble people of Berea, Christian coaches listen carefully for messages that might be from God and search the Scriptures to discern what is true.¹⁹ In working with others, coaches help people clarify their calling, discover their visions, and take steps to reach the goals God appears to have put into their lives.

Coaching is the art and practice of enabling individuals and groups to move from where they are to where *they* want to be.

Christian coaching is the art and practice of enabling individuals and groups to move from where they are to where **God** wants them to be.

Christian coaches use many of the methods used by their secular counterparts. Some Christian coaches work only with believers, but others work effectively with clients, groups, and whole corporations where there is no commitment to following Christ. Wherever they work, however, Christian coaches are unique in a number of ways.

First and most important is the biblical worldview the Christian coach brings to the relationship. Even a perusal of the many available books on coaching will show that most authors emphasize the ability of clients to look inside themselves with the guidance of their coaches; to listen for the values, purposes, and visions that are deep within; to focus on inner strengths; and to discover their passions and life purposes. There are no absolutes and few rules in this kind of thinking. And God is nowhere to be seen.

In contrast the Christian believes that humans are created in God's image.

We have fallen into sin, but we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, who offers forgiveness and salvation as a gift. We can ignore this offer of salvation or we can accept his free gift of abundant life on earth and eternal life that will come after we die.²⁰ The Christian lives with the awareness that God is sovereign, aware of his people, and willing to guide and empower those who are his children. Like everybody else, we seek to become aware of our passions, life purposes, inner strengths, and visions for the future, but Christians realize that these are God-given and we find ultimate fulfillment only when we are living in accordance with God's plans. For the Christian coach, God—not human ingenuity—is at the core of his or her being, and God is the guide for all coaching work.

What we believe influences who we are and,
in turn, impacts everything we do.

This leads to a second uniqueness of Christian coaching: the person of the coach. If you are a Christian, seeking to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, you will approach every aspect of your life from this perspective. Your commitment to Christ will affect your marriage, parenting, lifestyle, values, spending, time management, vocation, and perspectives that you bring to coaching. What we believe influences who we are and, in turn, affects everything we do. If it does not, there is something lacking in our relationship with Christ, something interfering with our level of commitment, something missing in our spiritual lives. We can maintain a halfhearted devotion to Christ and

still work as coaches, but the coaching we do will lack the power and impact that comes when we permit the Holy Spirit to guide our relationships with our clients.

Third, the Christian coach knows that none of us can be completely neutral. One of the goals of a coach is to ask questions that will help others identify and clarify their values but also to avoid imposing his or her own agenda on clients. We rarely advise and never tell people what they should do. Instead, we encourage people to set their own goals and directions, crystallize their own visions, and formulate their own mission statements and plans of action.

Even so, we cannot ignore the clear and final directive of Jesus to his followers: Make disciples. As we have seen, coaching is not discipleship, but we pray for the people we coach and want them, ultimately, to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. The previous sentence will be challenged by many professional coaches who staunchly maintain that coaching is non-directive and that the coach's role is to be neutral. A core concept of coaches, including Christian coaches, is that people adhere to decisions and move forward more effectively when they reach their own conclusions as opposed to when they are given advice or told what to do. Coaches encourage clients to set their own agendas, reach their own conclusions, and set their own plans of action. The coach tries to keep a stance of neutrality.

But no coach can be completely neutral. Even psychologist Carl Rogers, the founder of *nondirective counseling*, replaced this term with *person-centered counseling*, apparently because research was showing that total neutrality and lack of direction is a myth. Even if coaches strive to keep their values and perspectives tightly hidden, they cheer inside when others move in directions that are consistent with the coach's values and there is disappointment when clients move away. Every counselor knows that in time our own values and beliefs slip out despite our best efforts to keep them hidden. Isn't it more honest for coaches to admit that although we genuinely have regard for the independence and decisions of the people we coach, and even though we seek to maintain neutrality, nevertheless we are human beings whose values and views will impact what we say and how we will impact others?

Fourth, although the Christian coach is committed to learning and applying the established techniques of coaching that will be outlined in this book, he or she also prays regularly for clients and is not reluctant to discuss spiritual issues, especially in working with Christians who share worldviews and values similar to those of the coach. Christian values permeate the life of the Christian coach and flow into coaching even as we respect the uniqueness or individualities of clients and fully affirm their right to build lives on values

that we might consider non-Christian. Jesus once had a conversion with a rich young ruler who did not want to give up his possessions to follow Christ (see Mark 10:17-23). Jesus did not hide his beliefs, but neither did he force the man to change. The man was given the freedom to build his life as he wanted even though he was settling for something far from the best. At times we must allow clients to have the same freedom.

WHY WOULD ANYBODY WANT CHRISTIAN COACHING?

I have a friend whose work required him to write an important report that needed to be concise and completed by a fast-approaching deadline. When the first draft was completed, he sent it to me and I went over it with a red pen, making a bunch of editorial suggestions before calling him to discuss what he had sent. For more than an hour, we talked on the phone. I did not tell him what changes to make, but I gently pointed out some grammatical errors, inconsistencies, phrases that left me confused, and suggestions for making it better. All of this was in a context of encouragement for the job he had done, enthusiasm about what he had written, and genuine affirmation of him as a person and as a writer. As we talked, I was only vaguely aware that my daughter Jan was in the room using my computer.

She had seen the pile of coaching books on my desk, and when I hung up the phone, she asked if what she overheard had been coaching. That is exactly what I had been doing, even though this had not crossed my mind as my friend and I had talked. He wanted my help in writing a better report, and I responded by raising some questions and sometimes giving him guidance based on my experiences as a writer and editor. He felt some insecurity about the final product, but I encouraged him as we thought of reasons for believing that the report would be well received. He didn't feel criticized or that I had taken the responsibility of rewriting his report and advising him what to do. Instead, he had been coached.

People come for coaching because they want something to be different. The issue may be as simple as reworking an article or as complex as remodeling a life, but all coaching is about making changes. Coaches and the people they coach know that for the future to be different, we need to change the way we do things in the present. Sometimes these changes are like my editorial comments regarding my friend's report. More often, changes involve shifts in attitudes, thinking, perceptions, and behavior. There are as many potential changes and goals as there are people who want coaching, but some topics come up repeatedly:

- Developing skills in such areas as athletics, music, money management, public speaking, parenting, and leadership
- Discovering and developing passions
- Finding a life purpose
- Setting and reaching specific goals
- Building a clearer vision for the future
- Developing a mission statement for one’s life, business, or ministry
- Learning to manage change effectively
- Learning to relate to people effectively
- Finding clear values
- Building communication skills
- Appraising performance
- Getting unstuck, getting out of ruts, and moving forward
- Learning to think and see things differently
- Expanding the capacity to take action
- Getting free of self-sabotaging behavior and destructive self-talk—the kind of talk, for example, that says, “I can’t do it,” “Things will never change,” “Nobody will listen to me,” “I’ll never succeed, so why try!”
- Building better teams (in the same way one gets athletes to play for the name on the front of their shirts instead of their own names on the back)
- Building self-confidence
- Finding meaning in what one is doing
- Getting the courage to take risks
- Learning to take responsibility
- Finding the tools, support, and accountability to accomplish more
- Having the ability to focus better, be more efficient, and reach goals more quickly
- Developing a closer walk with God

In all of this, the goal for the coach is to work oneself out of a job so that the person being coached is able to make changes and then move forward without continued assistance.

This is illustrated creatively by the “amoeba theory of management” corporate coach James Flaherty presented in his book on coaching.²¹ Back in high school biology, we all learned that amoeba are single-celled protozoa. These amoebas can be moved in at least two ways: They can be poked to respond, or they can be enticed with sugar so that they move in its direction.

This is what behavioristic psychology would see as the most basic stimulus-response methods for bringing change. If the people you coach were amoeba, we could poke them verbally or reward them and watch them go. Sometimes, especially when there is pressure to get things moving, managers, professors, pastors, and even counselors still use this poke and entice approach. Often it works, but only for a while.

As soon as the stimulus ends, the movement stops and it is hard to sustain. When people merely respond to outside stimulation—like the demands of a boss, the advice of a parent, the admonitions of a preacher, or the prod of a teacher—there is little self-motivation to change behavior, rethink values, set personal goals, or discover one's passions. Instead, it is easier to become passive, waiting again until one is pushed. In reality, ambition, goal setting, risk taking, and creativity are all squelched. And because they tend to be smarter than amoeba, humans sometimes even find ways to avoid the poke or get the reward without taking the action. Every day, thousands of workers (and probably a lot of students) sit around in their jobs, trying to look good but doing very little else until they are poked or pulled again.

Certainly this example is unfair to the many research-based, positive aspects of behavioristic psychology, but there is a point in the illustration. To help others grow, coaches need to know their clients, build relationships, take time to assess where others are, and clarify goals. Client and coach need to work together in a partnership that gets things done in the present and clarifies how present learning can be applied in the future. When my friend and I finished going over his written report, he commented that the final document was better than the original and that, in addition, he had learned things about writing that he had never encountered before. He suggested that these would be incorporated next time he wrote a report. That's good coaching: helping another in the present so that he or she is self-motivated and equipped to do better in the future.

The following chapters attempt to give a comprehensive but very practical overview of what coaches do and how they can make a significantly positive impact in the lives and careers of others. Soon we'll move into the goals and methods of coaching, but that's not the place to start.

Have you ever gone to a physician who radiates impatience, always seems to be in a hurry, rarely listens to questions, and lacks sensitivity to his or her patients? Dr. Deme is not like that. When he first became my doctor, I recognized that he was a highly skilled practitioner. Even when he is under pressure—like most in his profession seem to be quite often—he answers my questions, is careful in his work, and shows a sense of humor that jibes

with mine. When I have a medical problem, I want a physician who is competent and knowledgeable but also cares about my needs and is able to connect with me on a personal as well as professional level. I want somebody who has the traits of an effective practitioner. Coaching clients want this as well. The place to begin your practical coaching development is to consider what will make you a good coach.