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Disciple Building: Life Coaching

Meeting People Where They Are,
Helping Them Take The Next Step[®]

BOB DUKES

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Disciple Building: Life Coaching

(Version 2.15)

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NOTE:

In an effort to recognize that both men and women are co-heirs of God's grace, we have chosen to use alternating gender pronouns in this document. However, we do recognize and embrace gender-specific roles in Scripture.

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Introduction

When I return to my hometown I often meet someone who says, “I’ll never forget your dad. He taught me to play baseball.” My Father coached in the recreation league for nearly twenty years. Several of his players played professionally, including two of my brothers. (Watching one of them pitch a scoreless inning in the World Series is still one of the highlights of my life.) Ironically “Pap” was never a star himself. Most of his short career was spent in the minor leagues during the Depression, struggling to find a place in the starting rotation. But he loved the game. He died several years ago but his legacy lives on, immortalized by a small plaque at one of the city parks and through the lives of countless boys who played on one of his teams.

He coached at a time when some fathers were unavailable, so he became a surrogate dad to my friends, instilling skills on the field and discipline in the dugout. But there was something else. After the games the team would sometimes show up at our house for a meal. He would move from player to player replaying the game as he rubbed heads and offered words of encouragement. My father never achieved what many would call success, working hard all his life with few tangible results. But when I bump into one of his former players, I’m amazed at the impact of his life.

Nearly everyone I know has had a similar experience. For some it was a teacher who influenced their lives, others followed the lead of a drama coach, for some a music instructor or close relative helped to shape their formative years. Many young people had a coach similar to my dad, someone who taught them more than game strategies and mechanics. These people who influence and strategically shape the lives of

others can be called Life Coaches. The most successful instill more than training and discipline, they impart their very lives to others. Of course, the best Life Coach of all is a caring parent. Moses admonished the parents of Israel to teach the laws of God to their children as they went about the routines of life. It was in the course of ordinary activities that lives were changed.

As you read and use the Life Coaching Manual, you will learn what Life Coaching means for a disciple builder. You will first learn what a Life Coach is and how she participates in helping others grow to Christlikeness. In addition to learning about your role, you will learn skills that will help you create a discipleship plan for individuals and groups. You will be able to use tools such as the *R-CAPS Grid* and the *Needs, Goals, Projects Approach* to help people take the next step to maturity both spiritually and practically, addressing needs that help individuals heal from emotional pain and also develop Christlike character. You will look at the ministry and person of Jesus and help people grow in a pattern based on His discipleship model. As you begin this journey, you will find that your ministry to others is much broader than merely communicating content, but involves developing a close relationship with another person. We believe the end result is that each person we coach will one day grow to model these same actions and recognize the value of investing in another person as well. As Paul first discipled Timothy, he saw Timothy take the things that were taught to him and practiced with him and in turn teach others who also would become disciple builders and Life Coaches. We at WDA believe that this manual will help you be more effective and fruitful in your ministry to others.

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What Is A Life Coach?

It's uncertain exactly how the term "Life Coach" became part of the popular vernacular, but the concept describes a person who is able to provide guidance, insight, and experience to others who are striving to succeed at various endeavors. Used in the business world it refers to someone able to help others become profitable in commercial ventures. In athletics, it's a person who prescribes workout routines to maximize physical strength and prowess. Used in a more general sense, it means anyone skilled at helping others remain focused and goal-driven. Sometimes a Life Coach can be someone the 'disciple' has never actually met face-to-face. In these cases, the insights are gleaned from books and tapes or by attending conferences.

But this manual is about a different kind of Life Coach. It's about Christian leaders who are willing to invest their knowledge and experience and even their very lives so that others might learn to think, feel and act like Jesus. A spiritual Life Coach is a person who, in the midst of a caring relationship, imparts truth that changes the life (conduct/ character) of another, gradually helping the disciple become more like Jesus Christ. In WDA, we often use the phrase, "*meeting people where they are, helping them take the next step*"[®] to describe the Life Coaching process. Those who are helped may not fully realize it until later, but they're forever impacted by the life and example of these leaders. It was Jesus who said "but

everyone [disciple], after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." (NAS) Used in this way, there's another term that can be substituted for "Life Coaching," "disciple building."¹

Spiritual Life Coaching

Jesus Christ was the ultimate Life Coach. In the Gospel of John, He offers this promise: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (NAS) The Great Commission given to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 is both a command and invitation to join Him on one of the greatest adventures in life: building disciples. Spiritual Life Coaching involves "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." (NAS) There are two implications to this command that often escape our notice. The first is that the teaching should be comprehensive. We are to teach **everything**, not just the familiar principles or the introductory concepts. Spiritual Life Coaches must ask the question: "Is my coaching part of a larger, comprehensive plan to teach the whole curriculum of Christ?"

The second implication is that we should help the people we are teaching to actually **obey the truth**. I like to call this *doing* truth versus just *knowing* truth. There is a clear biblical priority to evangelize the nations and plant churches, but we must not forget that the Great Commission includes helping Christ's followers become "conformed to the likeness of His Son [Christ]." Our spiritual Life Coaching must be *intensive* and *intentional* enough to transform lives.

¹ We will be using several different terms interchangeably to describe Life Coaching as it relates to disciple building. (E.g. "spiritual Life Coach," "one-to-one disciple building," "discipler/ disciple builder," etc.)

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But any parent can tell you this is easier said than done. Teaching others to ‘do’ truth is a complex process that involves the changing of motives, values, and worldview. It also hopes to develop a walk of faith, teaching people how to trust God. This type of training cannot be accomplished in a classroom alone. It must be worked out in the context of real life experiences. Some of the concepts, such as how to develop and demonstrate mature love, are not simple. This is why spiritual Life Coaches are critical to the process. It’s only in the context of a close relationship (where there is encouragement, accountability, prayer, and teaching) that this type of transformation can effectively occur.

The importance of the example and teaching of a spiritual Life Coach cannot be overstated. Paul admonished Timothy to follow him as he followed Christ. In another place the instruction was for Timothy to follow the “pattern of sound teaching” that Paul had taught. Timothy learned these truths from Paul in the context of close relationships. II Timothy 2:2 states, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (NAS) Jesus, after washing His disciples feet as a model of Christian love and leadership, urged them, “Now that you *know* these things, you will be blessed if you *do* them” (emphasis mine).

We who build disciples should be encouraged by the importance God places on the Life Coaching process. The Scriptures remind us that anyone who aspires to the office of overseer has an honorable, noble role in the Kingdom. But we should also be sobered by the responsible role God expects us to play. Paul warns the Corinthian church that “each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Paul goes on to explain that we can either build by using temporal materials or eternal materials, but there will be a Day when we must give an account for our work of building up others.

In order to be effective disciple builders, we must

Our spiritual Life Coaching must be intensive and intentional enough to transform lives.

realize that God is the author and finisher of the process of sanctification. Paul states, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.” (NAS) In another place Paul asserts that “He who began a good work in you will perfect [complete] it until the Day of Christ Jesus.” (NAS) Spiritual Life Coaches can take heart that God will sovereignly oversee the process.

The role of spiritual Life Coaching is only one part of the disciple building process. For years there has been a debate in disciple building circles about what is the best forum for helping people grow spiritually. The advocates of **small groups** can list examples of people whose lives have been changed by the

intimacy and accountability of this arrangement, while the proponents of **one-to-one** discipleship (Life Coaching) cite the advantages of this format. Others extol the merits of **teaching and preaching**, or the benefits of being well-read. Some point out the importance of putting disciples into **ministry situations** as the best way to facilitate growth and development. The **spiritual disciplines** such as fasting, solitude, or personal devotions are mentioned by many as being especially beneficial in spiritual formation.

All of these forms constitute healthy approaches to spiritual development. All should be included as part of a disciple building program. Each format has certain advantages and certain limitations. It is valuable to note that Jesus used *all* of these forms as part of His disciple building training. Because the local church has all of these structures (e.g. small groups, teaching, preaching, etc.), it is the best location for making and training disciples if the structures are utilized strategically. Within the church there is a unique role for a well-equipped Life Coach. This person is able to “meet people where they are, and help them take the next step.”

If disciple building is the overall process in which more mature believers assist less mature believers as they grow, then spiritual Life Coaching is the “one-to-one” part of the process. A Life Coach is able to help a disciple integrate and incorporate all

the other growth processes into a unified whole. The Life Coach is responsible for tracking and overseeing the progress of the individual believers entrusted to his care. This individual encouragement and accountability is invaluable. As we will see later, this is best accomplished when the Life Coach works in concert with a team of others in a ministry context. One of the purposes of this manual is to offer assistance and coaching skills to help make the task of Life Coaching more manageable and successful.

Balancing Process And Programs, Mystery And Methods

One of my favorite destinations is The Cotswolds of England. Linda and I discovered this delightful part of the United Kingdom quite by accident. I was speaking at a forum near Oxford one summer and a friend suggested we take a driving tour through the surrounding countryside. Every turn of the road afforded new vistas of quaint villages constructed with the honey-colored stone that makes the region so famous. But the highlight for me was exploring the beautiful gardens of the area. Each was unique, but the most exquisite had one trait in common: they had been meticulously planned, planted, and nurtured by a master gardener.

In a similar way God has created each of us as individuals, uniquely designed to reflect His image and character. But He has created common growth patterns and processes that define and shape our development. This presents an interesting challenge and opportunity for a spiritual Life Coach. We need to understand the growth processes that God has established, and at the same time we must resist the notion that we can program growth. Not only is it impossible to program such complexity, it would be wrong to attempt it. God delights in the diversity and

² On one occasion Jesus fed 5000 with five loaves and two fish. Another time He fed 4000 using a different combination. Once He healed a blind man by spitting in the dirt and applying a mud-poultice to his eyes. Another time He simply spoke and someone received sight. God meets each of us where we are, then He helps us to take the next step.

uniqueness or the various parts of His creation, and man is His crowning creative achievement. The Fall has corrupted and tarnished mankind, yet sin has not completely obliterated His image in us. Disciple building is one of the means by which we are significantly restored to His image and to the purpose for which He created us.

Even though we are all uniquely created, this does not mean that we can't develop strategies to help each other grow. The objective is to understand and utilize the processes of spiritual growth while allowing room for the uniqueness of the individual and the (often) mysterious purposes of God. Jesus was the Master of living in the tension of mystery and method. While emphasizing the sovereignty and mystery associated with the working of God's Spirit in John 3:8, He also spoke of a discipleship training process in Luke 6:40. A careful study of the Gospels reveals that our Lord had an overarching strategy for developing His ministry and training His disciples. He repeatedly utilized five Life Coaching initiatives to prompt spiritual development in His followers. (We will learn more about these later.) In the midst of this coaching paradigm there was diversity and creativity.²

We All Need Encouragement.

I must confess that when I first typed the heading for this section I felt a little embarrassed, and somewhat irritated. My lingering false sense of masculinity still recoils from the idea of needing anyone to "come alongside and help." Growing up, I was intrigued by John Wayne and the ruggedness of the "loner" roles he played in the movies. This isolated approach felt "right" to me because I had been deeply wounded (emotionally) during my childhood, and one of my coping mechanisms was to withdraw from anyone who might get close enough to hurt me again.

But I'm learning that in order to heal, I need to get close to others. Being married to a wonderful friend has convinced me of the importance of intimate companionship. But every man needs another man who can confirm and validate him, and every woman needs another woman with whom to relate and com-

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municate the deep places of her heart. There is an intimacy in relating to those of the same gender that opposite-gender love cannot achieve. Every TV commercial that focuses on the oddities of being “a guy with other guys” taps into this dynamic.

The trouble is that there are so few people who are ‘safe’ enough or accessible enough to approach. (But, here’s the encouraging news: you wouldn’t be reading this unless you were willing to expand these ranks!) Some who read this have never been “Life Coached” (discipled) themselves. Others may have some experience in helping others grow. This manual is designed to help anyone who wants to learn more. Regardless of your experience, I hope you can pick up new ideas that will make you even more effective. The learning curve may be steep and the obstacles myriad, but the benefits far outweigh the liabilities. I hope you will continue and never stop learning. The health and welfare of the family, the church, and society depends on people like you who aspire to help others grow to maturity.

We Have a Partnership with God.

Spiritual transformation is accomplished partly

The health and welfare of the family, the church, and society depends on people like you who aspire to help others grow to maturity.

through a unique partnership between God and individual Life Coaches He appoints to assist Him in the proclamation of truth. Paul explains this dynamic in I Corinthians when he says that he planted and

Apollos watered but it was God who was causing the growth. It is important to note that there are distinct stages of growth mentioned. Paul was used by God at the initial stage of planting the seed of Christian truth leading to conversion, then Apollos came afterward to help the truth take root and continue to grow. Later we will explore in more detail some of the progressive stages of spiritual growth. By understanding this progression, a Life Coach is better equipped to help others.

Scripture is filled with admonitions that leaders in the church should help younger believers grow and develop. But this begs the question: “How do we help someone else grow?” As already stated, we should resist the idea that spiritual development can be reduced to a program, but wise Life Coaches can design and implement specific growth projects that meet individual disciples at their point of need and help them take the next step in their development. Though there aren’t formulas for growth, there are growth initiatives that Life Coaches can utilize to help others progress in their faith development.