



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 22: Exposing Tolerations

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[Intro Music]

Brian Miller: Welcome to the Coach Approach Ministries podcast where we help people find their way with God by training the best Christian coaches in the world. I'm Brian Miller, strategic director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by the executive director of CAM, Mr. Bill Copper. Welcome Bill.

Bill Copper: Hello Brian. Good to be with you again today.

Brian: In today's episode, we wanted to discuss a powerful awareness of an internal obstacle that's holding back every person listening to this, including ourselves. The awareness is tolerations. Tolerations, simply put, are what we put up with. We're hopeful that this podcast will bring awareness of your own tolerations and give you some handles on how to help yourself, and others, move past them. Bill, tell us about tolerations.

Bill: Well to add to the definition, not only are they things we put up with, but internally, we think that we don't have any choice, that they just are, and the biggest awareness that comes is that first realization that, no, we don't have to just tolerate it, to just put up with it. We do have options, and choices, and power. Often times, those options, those choices, are to change the dynamic. Other times, our option and our choice is to look at the dynamic in a different way so that it doesn't feel like a toleration or something that we're putting up with. Tolerations, sometimes they're just little things. Sometimes they're bigger things. They often start out as little things that we think are no big deal, but over time, the weight of tolerating, or putting up with it over, and over, and over, becomes an internal block to us, and often times, a blind spot for us because we begin to believe that there's nothing that can be done about it. I can remember the first time that I had a good realization of this principle. I was being coached, and in fact, I had just recently taken my first coach training class, so this has been in 2003, so quite a while back, and I was managing a facility, a leadership development retreat center, great place.

I'd come in following another leader who had a completely different style than I did, and I started getting coached by my mentor coach, and I brought up this issue that had been dogging me and that I just felt like, well, I can't do anything about it, but I think I just wanted to vent that day about something, and my coach says, "What do you mean you can't do anything about it?" I went to work at this

leadership development retreat center, became the director there, and I had a staff person. Johnny had been at this facility since he was 11 years old, and Johnny's now 65, or 66. At the time, he was late fifties. His whole adult life had been working there at that facility as the maintenance, grounds, facilities operations guy. That's all he'd ever done. He loved the place. He lived two doors down. He had some ownership of that place, and every morning, Johnny would get there about an hour before I would, and when I would pull the gates, and Brian, I'm not exaggerating, every morning, Johnny would, from his office over in another building, see me pull in the gates, and by the time I drove through the gates, around to the main building, and parked, Johnny had jumped in his little golf cart-wagon-type thing and run around and met me at my car.

As I walked from my car into the office building, around to my office, the whole time Johnny's walking alongside me, telling me everything that's happened that morning. So he would tell me about the water heater that he had changed out, and about the raccoon that he chased away from the garbage cans, he would show me, he would have the used parts in his hand from the light switch that he had changed out. He was kind of filling me in on everything that happened in that hour before I got there, and it drove me crazy. All I could think about was if Johnny would just get out of here. I don't have any coffee, and he would follow me in, and this happened every day, he would follow me into my office, I would sit in my chair, he would stand in the door, and he was still talking to me.

I would hook up my computer. I would get everything going, and finally, I would look up at him with this look like, "What?" He would kind of get the hint, every morning Brian, I'm not kidding, every morning, he would get the hint, and all of a sudden his demeanor would change, and he would kind of frown, and he would say, "Well, boss, I can see you're busy. If you need anything, let me know," and he would kind of slink out of the office and get on his wagon, and he would go. I would feel terrible for a little bit, and I would think, "Golly Johnny. I don't care what you did this morning. You do a great job. I don't need that," and I saw it as this bother.

Brian: I was wondering the whole time what part of the light switch was broken, and I really appreciate you coming in and showing me that it was that lever there because I was up all night just wondering what it was.

Bill: Well exactly, and what Johnny was doing, partly he was reacting to the previous manager who wanted to know that stuff, and partly just his personality was, he wanted to share, "Hey, I've been busy today, boss." He's going through all of that, and after this happened one day, I remember talking to my coach, and I'm just kind of venting about it. My coach said something about, "Well, why don't you do something about that," and I actually said, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it. That's just how he is," and he says, "What do you mean there's nothing you can do about it? Of course you can do something about it. You're the boss. You can do whatever you want to," and he explained this concept of tolerations, and what I loved about my coach was, my coach didn't say, "Well do this. Just tell him not to come in your office for a while. Tell him he's not allowed." He didn't say anything. He just said, "It's up to you."

What he wouldn't allow me to do is just sit there and believe that there was nothing I could do about it, and the end of that story is, what I did instead of saying, "Johnny, don't come in my office anymore." What my coach helped me understand was, there were some reasons Johnny does that, what are they?

What difference does it make, and I began to shift my thinking into rather than seeing that as a bother every morning, I'm going to see that as a brief way to invest in Johnny for the day. So I made a plan, and the next morning when I drove in, I was watching for him, and there he jumped in that wagon, and he met me out there. I got in my car, and I just stopped there, and leaned on the trunk of my car, and said, "So what's been going on this morning Johnny?" He started telling me, and I said, "Come on, let's go inside." Instead of going to my office, I sat in the lobby area on one of the couches, and I said, "So what's been going on with you?" I talked with him for just a little bit. He shared everything he'd done. I asked him how his grandson was doing because he's always talking about his grandson's sports, and it might have been five minutes, and then Johnny bounced up, and said, "Well I need to get going boss. Thanks. I hope you have a great day." He sailed out of there. He just bounced out of there, got in his little wagon, and drove off.

I went into my office, and I thought, "You know, I've just invested in that guy. I don't feel down and guilty like I have every morning since I've been here, and it didn't cost me anymore time than if I'd been fiddling with my computer, doing this, doing that." It was sold that day on the fact that I don't have to look at what he did as a bother. I can look at it as I get to invest that little bit of time, and what I found was over the next nine years that we worked together, Johnny was my biggest fan there. To this day, five years later, when I call him on the phone on his birthday or something, he says, "Hey boss. How's it going?" I don't think I've had a conversation with him in the last four or five years that he doesn't say, "You know, you're the best boss I ever had," and all because, rather than see him as a bother in that all-important five minutes in the morning, instead, I changed the way that I looked at him and decided that I would invest in him. He wouldn't let me lift a finger on so many things for the rest of those nine years that we were together. He felt lifted up. It was great, and it just changed, fundamentally, our relationship.

My introduction to tolerations was change the way that you look at it. The situation doesn't have to change. You could have changed it, but what it did was it gave me power. Before that day, I felt powerless in that. "Well, I can't do anything about it. That's how he is. He's going to get out of the car, and he's going to follow me over there, and there's nothing I can do about it." That feeling of powerlessness was what made it burdensome for me, and when my coach helped me see, "Np, you have all the power here. Treat this however you want." I didn't have to get rid of the behavior in order to make it a difference for me. Instead, I chose to say, "I'm going to change the way I look at that behavior." Although the external situation didn't change, the effect it had on me and the internal block it had on me completely changed. Now, since that time, as I've identified tolerations, there are other times when I have dealt with it. I have made a change to it. I have eliminated the behavior. The point for us coaches is to help people, first of all, to identify those tolerations, to challenge those assumptions that it can't be different, that you have no control, and then to invite the clients to determine, to take power back, to determine, "What is it you're going to do about it?"

Brian: I think the ah-hah I had, and it's been true in my life looking at tolerations, is that the toleration itself put a sense in me of pushing hard, just finally putting my foot down because I was feeling that inside me, that irritation, or anger, or whatever that could be, but once I realized what the toleration was and that I could do something about it, I had a whole range of possible actions I could take which were totally different, and that's exactly what happened with me and getting coached through a

toleration. I was thinking, I'm going to have to get serious about this, put my foot down, whatever. Once I realized I did have some power, I actually took the softest possible move to make the thing change, and I thought that was really good. You made me think the... Go ahead.

Bill: I was going to say, the key there is the empowerment part. Changing my mindset, and your mindset from I have no power, I'm helpless here and it's a frustration to me. It changed the mindset to, I have all the power in the world. I get to choose how I deal with this, and I'd say most often with my clients, their choice is to not change the behavior, but to change how they view the behavior so that it's not burdensome for them anymore.

Brian: I had a client a couple years ago, a young guy, and his boss was mistreating him, wasn't respecting him well enough, was micromanaging a bit, and he thought his only response was to become a better Christian so it didn't bother him so much. I was thinking the same thing with you. Your response could have been, "If I was a better Christian, I wouldn't be so irritated by this." Instead of asking a question, I actually made concise statement. I said, "You'll never be that good a Christian." I think that's the absolute truth. You can't solve it by thinking, "I won't get angry. I won't get frustrated." You've got to realize this is a toleration, and you do have some power. Once the client realized he had some power, he saw some options, and we rehearsed some options that I think were, hopefully, really helpful.

Bill: As you said, your option was to take the least, the softest approach, and often times, that is our response when we realize we have options. So when you don't have options, all you can think of is a harsh... But when you realize there's a whole host of options, and you're the one actually in control of that, then our position then changes. Our outlook on it changes. So the keys to us in our own lives dealing with tolerations is to name them, to realize, "Hey, that's a toleration. That's an irritant that I've just accepted as I can't do anything about," and the truth is I have choices here. Our colleague Chad wrote a recent blog post about this, I like what he said here, "Is to give ourselves permission to live a toleration-free life." In other words, we sometimes think that that's our burden. Sometimes even as Christian leaders we think, "We have to suffer to really, truly live this whole life." No. We can live a toleration-free life. That doesn't mean we change every circumstance around us. Sometimes it means we change how we look at it. We do have permission. It is okay for us to not struggle, and suffer, and be irritated by things that hold us back. Once we name the toleration, realize it's okay not to have it, not to put up with it, then it's time to figure out what to do about it.

Brian: There's a couple ways to measure a toleration, Bill. You can certainly look to see how much control you actually do have over it. That's one way. So a coach could really bring some identity into that, to say, "Let's really take a look at how much control you have." There are going to be a few things that you find out you really have no control over that.

Bill: There are times when we don't have control over the external, so my coach was right in that first toleration that I experienced. "Yeah, you're the boss. You can do whatever you want." That's not always true. There are times when you don't have control over the external circumstances, but you always have control, in fact, you're the only one who has control over your perspective on it, over how you're going to think about it, how you're going to view it. Sometimes it is just the recognition that you do have control over that that allows you to say, "Okay, I don't need to change the condition, the behavior, or the circumstances, but I am going to change how I view it," and that's different from, "I'm just going to

be a better Christian.” It’s different from setting unrealistic expectations to change your behavior, but then you can have a mindset shift that says, “I’m going to look at their perspective on this instead of mine. I’m going to believe something different about this than I believe about mine. I’m going to reframe how I view this circumstance, so it’s not burdensome on me.” When we have those kinds of choices, we have control over every one of our tolerations. There is some freedom that does come from understanding which external circumstances we have control over and which ones we don’t, and that can help in our strategy on how to deal with a toleration, but underlying all of that is we always have control over how we view it.

Brian: I was interviewing a head basketball coach at a high school the other day, well a couple years ago actually, and he said, “Brian, I’m going to get fired from this job, and I can get fired doing it the way the school board wants me to do it, or I can get fired doing it the way I want to do it.” There are multiple perspectives on how much control you actually have. He put himself into a perspective that gave him all the control, and they do get fired a lot. He didn’t get fired. He won back to back state championships instead, but the school board is not the one who knows how to coach the team better than the coach. You do need to make sure you’re in reality. The coach can really help the client figure out, have a better perspective about, the whole situation.

Bill: Yeah, and we talk about challenging someone’s beliefs, challenging the fact that “I can’t do anything about this.” We want to challenge those assumptions. It’s also important for us to challenge the client on the other end. When we have a person to say... When we help them see you don’t have to tolerate this. You do have permission to have a toleration-free life, and their response is, “Good. I’m going to walk in, and I’m going to tell the boss, ‘You’re never going to do that to me again. You’re never going to do that.’” We also do some challenging there where we say, “How well is that going to work? What are some other options that’ll work?” We want to challenge them in their own negative self-talk, but we also want to challenge, just like we do with all of their actions, challenge them to really evaluate how well this is going to meet their goals.

Brian: Absolutely. What else do we need to know about tolerations, Bill?

Bill: I think to recognize that for some of us, what was a toleration for me was a way of life for someone else. So I looked at it as a toleration for Johnny to come and show me what was going on every morning, but for Johnny, though, that’s who he was. That’s his way of life. That’s how he lives and lives, and others who might be “tolerating,” I say in air quotes, the things that I tolerate, for them it didn’t feel like a toleration at all. That’s how they live their life, and it’s fine. Let’s don’t think things that feel like a toleration to us and assume that anyone else in those circumstances is going to feel that same burden of toleration. For some, that’s just their way of life. They’re fine with it. They’re happy with it, and it doesn’t bother them, so let’s not project our own tolerations onto others.

Brian: It felt like it gave you, I’m sure this isn’t directly related to tolerations, but it gave you a judo move, and I’m no expert in martial arts, but you used their momentum to change the direction as opposed to you having to bring up a ton of energy to stop it.

Bill: I think that’s a great analogy for us in coaching who deal with tolerations.

Brian: Bill, I appreciate your time on this. I think this is going to be helpful for people to recognize tolerations in their own life, and I think it's going to help us as coaches to identify when our clients are holding a toleration, and how to bring some awareness. I appreciate your time Bill.

Bill: Good to be with you Brian.

Brian: Brian: Thank you so much for joining us. You can find out more about us by going to www.coachapproachministries.org and downloading our free eBook, *The Beginner's Guide to Christian Coaching: How to Have Powerful Conversations That Really Make a Difference*. We'll see you next week.

[Outro Music]