



Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

Episode 51: Coaching Discipleship

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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. Our podcast today is sponsored by our certificate in Christian Leadership Coaching. This is a nine month, ICF-approved coach training program that will prepare you to coach those around you to set goals, take action, and reach new levels of success. We have a cohort forming in July, so if you're interested, go to our website at www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. I'm Brian Miller, Strategic Director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by Neil Prentice. I am so excited to have you on the podcast today Neil.

Neil Prentice: Well thank you Brian.

Brian: I'm going to just read a little bit about you, there's just so much about you here. "Go and make disciples" was the command that Neil heard as a teenager. His passion of making disciples fulfills his value of making an impact in the world. He grew up in a Christian home where he was instilled with solid values, one of which was to make a difference. I like this guy already. I don't know if you listeners like what I'm hearing so far. Neil understands ministry. He was an associate pastor for 19 in Delaware where learned about teamwork both with paid staff and with a volunteer staff of over 200 people.

It was here that he learned the importance of God's word in his life. Neil understands the challenges that come along with the pastoral call. The call to missions was one that Neil wasn't expecting, but he answered that call and after fifteen years continues to serve in Mexico. It was during those early years in Mexico that God opened his eyes to Cheryl, a wonderful lady that Neil grew up with in his church. Cheryl too had been called to Mexico. Neil and Cheryl followed the Lord's leading in marriage in 2004, and then one little more part. As part of their ministry, they become certified through the International Coach Federation to become coaches for their mission agency. They use coaching skills in discipleship ministries in Mexico and with pastors and missionaries around the world. Neil, welcome to the podcast my friend.

Neil: Well thank you, it's great to be here with you Brian.

Brian: So, you're in Mexico as we speak!

Neil: I am. I am, I'm in Puebla, Mexico. If I look out the window, I can see this huge volcano that is very active today.

Brian: I could not have told you there's a volcano in Mexico.

Neil: Yes, there is.

Brian: So, are you safe right this minute, or is it Pompeii all over again?

Neil: No, this is pretty normal. The volcano is one of the most active in the world. It's name is Popocatepetl. I won't ask you to repeat that.

Brian: Well, my daughter does the transcript, and so I can't wait to see her transcribe the name of the volcano. That'll be good, so, I'm looking forward to this conversation Neil because discipleship, and this is certainly my value, and I think it's hard to argue with, discipleship has got to be the number one thing we as Christians do.

Neil: Well it was God's request of us. It wasn't a request actually, it was a command. When Jesus told his disciples, "Go and make disciples," it's not an option. That's what we're asked to do.

Brian: And he didn't say, "Go and have service every Sunday," and yet we do, and I'm not saying we shouldn't, but we're great, if that was what he had said, we're great at it.

Neil: Yeah, right. Right, and the whole conversation about discipleship; I'm hearing more and more conversation because I think from the pastor's point of view in the United States right now, **Barna Store** study, I believe, showed that 1 in 9 or 1 in 10 pastors believe that their discipleship in the church falls very, very short.

Brian: Oh my, yeah I'm glad because I think it's true. I think it falls short as well.

Neil: Yes, and I think coaching brings an aspect into the discipling relationship that is so unique and provides such an environment for rapid spiritual growth. I should change that. I don't think it, I know it. I've seen it here in Mexico. Using these principles and just watching disciples of Christ grow really fast.

Brian: We think a weekly service is discipleship, and we could argue about whether that is or is not, but we are as pastors, and I pastored for twenty years, we are disappointed by the effect, or lack of effect, it seems to have in creating disciples. Let me start with I think the most basic question: what is discipleship?

Neil: Discipleship is a process. It's a journey. It's a journey to pursue Christ's likeness, and I believe that the end is you have a person who is a follower of Christ. Now, that's a very general statement, but it's one that carries a lot of depth to it because a follower of Christ is one who obeys and one who multiplies himself or herself. I think we're falling short on the process, we're falling short on the purpose.

Brian: So, the most simple definition I've seen is it's one who hears from God and one who obeys what they've heard.

Neil: Yes. Take a look at that verse in Matthew 28, the great commission, another time, and you'll see that we're asked to disciple, baptizing and teaching, and that word, "teaching," is a very interesting word because in the depth of that word, the root of that word in the Greek, is actually "to learn," and we're doing a lot of teaching, but unfortunately our disciples are not learning that much.

Brian: I've heard this in churches throughout my life, that a lot of people just wish they could retain more information. If they could only retain more information or learn more information, that would be so helpful to them.

Neil: Unfortunately, statistics are backing what you're saying. That, from a sermon, a person may only remember only about 10% the following day of the sermon. In the following week, you're down to 1%. When you think about all of the time and effort a pastor puts into communicating properly the word of God, to have only a 1% retention rate after a week, that's pretty depressing for us pastors.

Brian: Yeah, because it took 50% of my time.

Neil: Right.

Brian: To get 1% of it remembered is sad, painful.

Neil: It is. We're seeing things around the world happening. They're seeing a discipleship movement that is going on, that's popped up in different continents around the world. We're seeing multiple churches formed rapidly, and they're all using a similar technique, it's called the discovery technique, for bible study. That's one in which a person reads the Bible himself or herself, and they respond to just a few questions. What did you learn about God? What did you learn about yourself or mankind? How are you going to apply that? Who else needs to hear this message? It's very simple and it falls right into the process of coaching.

Brian: Most certainly. How would you start to flush out discipleship? You talked about it being people obeying God and reproducing themselves. I certainly agree with that. You were talking about the main delivery system that at least the North American church has used has been sermons, and it's statistically ineffective, so how would you begin to flush out discipleship?

Neil: As a whole, discipleship is a relationship with Jesus Christ. That's the basis of it. If the person is not pursuing that relationship with Jesus Christ, then they're not a disciple. It's interesting, again going back to scripture, it's pretty clear that some of Jesus' disciples were not believers. After the feeding of the five thousand, a number of disciples left. They weren't believers in Jesus Christ, so when you start looking at that and start saying it's a process, it's a process that begins before salvation and continues after salvation. It's a process of getting to know who Jesus Christ is.

Brian: And in a way that's not like us getting to know who George Washington was because George Washington is dead.

Neil: Exactly, and Jesus Christ is very much alive.

Brian: How does that start? What's the beginning of discipleship for you?

Neil: The beginning of discipleship is a curiosity. A curiosity of who Jesus Christ is. Just to give you an example that's going on right now in fact, I'll be meeting with this young man in just a few minutes. He's an 18-year-old who had heard about Jesus as a child and was really curious, but unfortunately, he fell into temptation with drugs and alcohol. He knew that I was a follower of Christ, so just a few days ago, he came to talk to me. He said, "I need a change. My life needs to change." The bottom line of that conversation was he knew that he needed to know who Jesus Christ was in his life. This week he's been reading through John, and we'll just sit down with him and say, "What did you learn? What did you learn about God? What did you learn about yourself? What actions do you need to take, and who else needs to hear this?"

Four very simple questions. As he responds to that, he's going to be interacting with scripture directly because he read it, and the fact of the matter is that the teacher is the Holy Spirit regardless. We find that in 1 John:227. The Holy Spirit really doesn't need other teachers, he chooses to use them, but he doesn't need them. As this young man interacts with scripture, the Holy Spirit is going to be working in his life. My role as a discipler, my role as a coach, is to provide him that space that we talk about in coaching all the time, to provide him that space to work out his relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm sure this young man will come to Christ eventually, but he'll do it through the scripture, and once he makes that decision to come to Christ, he will have a solid basis not based on my words, but based on God's words. To me, that is the difference. I don't come with the answers. He discovers the answers, and I'm asking him questions to help in that discovery process.

Brian: Well, what you're getting at right there is that, I don't want to blanket everybody, but we don't trust the Holy Spirit. I don't trust the Holy Spirit to make it very clear to people what He wants them to know. I need to filter it. I need to check it. I need to add to it.

Neil: Right. Paul told Timothy, "Take care of your life and your doctrine." The two things are very important. And we as coaches, as life coaches, as Christian life coaches, we're helping people to take care of their life and to follow Christ.

Brian: I remember a story I heard, it was probably ten, fifteen years ago now. It was pastor Bob Roberts in Keller, Texas, and he was doing some work with a new pastor. A new pastor, but a new Christian in a southeast Asia country. The guy was a pastor now, but he didn't know much about the Bible at all. He was just sharing with Bob that he was starting to have a voice speak to him inside, internally. What struck me the most is Bob said, "I didn't tell him it was the Holy Spirit. I just wanted to wait and see how the Holy Spirit developed that in him and explained it to him. I wanted to hear from him through the Holy Spirit how it was communicated." I think that's so hard for most of us to let people learn from the Holy Spirit, and not just give them a head start.

Neil: Yes, yes, but isn't that the challenge of us as coaches as well because so many times we see what the answer should be, but as a coach maybe that's not the right answer for them. We have to guard our

thoughts in solving peoples' problems. Chad Hall has a wonderful book out, *Coach the Person, Not the Problem*, but we jump in to solve that problem. We do that even worse in discipleship, that we always have the answers. One of my goals is not to give the answer, just to give the space so that the person can find the answer in scripture. I may direct him to a passage of scripture, but they have to find that answer in that passage of scripture. Too many times today we hear people say, "Well, my pastor says..." There are thousands of godly men as pastors today, but we're human. I would much rather someone says, "You know, this is what God says in his word." To me, that is developing a follower of Christ, not a follower of me.

Brian: It's a huge difference, right? It's even better because I won't be there all the time, but the Holy Spirit will always be there.

Neil: Right, and that's why Christ said, "It's to your advantage that I go away because I'm going to send you a comforter." And that word, "comforter," is Paraklētos. It's interesting, that's the noun, the verb form is used by Paul in Thessalonians when he says, "Encourage one another and build one another up." That word "encourage" is the verb form of Paraklētos. It's a fascinating study. "One who comes alongside." That's what we as coaches do. That's what we're trained to do.

Brian: You're going to start with a disciple. You and I, I'm sure we both agree, you're not starting with nothing, you're starting with scripture, and you start with the assumption that the scripture is the word of God, and this is a great place for people to start to hear from God. I greatly appreciate that. The first thing you're doing with the disciple, maybe not first, but always setting this foundational level of awareness of God and his voice.

Neil: Yes. Without a doubt, that is where it starts. Here in Mexico we have the different cults that go around and knock on the doors, and they say, they all say, "The Bible says..." and they tell you what the Bible says. I could go to my neighbors and knock on their door and say, "The Bible says," but why would they trust me versus somebody else? To me, it's much better to have them looking in God's word themselves and seeing what God's word says about who God is.

Brian: Because you might get them to believe what you said, but they don't have a relationship with Christ just because they believe.

Neil: We start with a debate because this person says this, another person says that. I go to a worship service on Sunday, and they say this. How do I know who's right? Immediately you're in a debate. I have another contact right now, he grew up in a family that his father's family and his mother's family were on absolutely opposite ends of the spectrum religiously, and he said, "They both say the Bible is God's word. How do I know which one is right?" Well, you start reading the Bible, and you find out for yourself, and he is. He too has started reading God's word. The basis of finding out who God is, the awareness of who God is, and the awareness of who I am are critical in this process of discipleship.

Brian: Talk a little bit more about who I am.

Neil: I see it as a core competency, this creating awareness,

and that's what we as coaches do.

Brian: Creating awareness and helping them see who they are and helping them see who God is.

Neil: Exactly.

Brian: And then what would you layer on top of that? Is that a fair question?

Neil: Sure. To put on top of that, once they come to a relationship in Christ, that's when the fun really starts because they get to discover, on their own, what God is doing in their life as they discover more of who God is, His love for them, His omniscience, His holiness, and now they have a relationship with this almighty God that they never knew existed. That is a dynamic change-maker in their life. They no longer have the desires to smoke the marijuana, or lie to their parents, or lie to their spouse. The desires go away because they're a follower. They want to know who this God is, and they're discovering it in the scripture, in God's word. That makes all the difference in the world.

Brian: So, they move from having an awareness of God, who he is, who I am, to starting to see a path.

Neil: Right, as they walk down that path, they begin to serve God. They also very naturally start to talk to others. The DNA that has been planted is one of not necessarily giving the answers. It's of asking questions, and anybody can do that.

Brian: Yeah, yeah. Let me do the reverse just to check on it. Where is coaching not a great tool in discipleship?

Neil: There's some things you're just going to have to teach. When disciples are reading through Revelations. That is a tough book to coach through.

Brian: It's a tough book period.

Neil: There comes times as well, that we have to challenge the disciples, and I think that is normal if you look at leadership in general. There are six basic styles of leadership, of which coaching is one of those. All of them are valid, but the demanding leadership style works really great if there's a fire in the building and the leader is barking out orders of where to get out of the building. You don't use the coach approach of questioning in a time of emergency, and it's likewise with the disciples. There are times that you teach, there are times that you coach. I, because of my training, lean more on coaching, but I also use other techniques as well and other tools to help a disciple follow Christ, but the bottom line is he or she has to be a follower of Christ and not a follower of Neil. That's really dangerous, and how many of us can give examples of men and women in ministry who have fallen and people walk away because they were following a man, they weren't following Christ.

Brian: We're running out of time. I could talk to you all day. What would be your advice to someone who is trying to make disciples?

Neil: That's a good question. I think my advice to someone who wants to make disciples is to develop coaching as a tool. Take a look at the example of God, and of Jesus, and the questions he asked. The first

question in the Bible was asked by God to Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” That question was not asked because God didn’t know. It was a question of developing awareness in Adam and Eve. Moses is standing in front of a bush, and God says, “What do you have in your hand?” Again, he knew what was in his hand. He was creating awareness. I could go on and on. Elijah, “Why are you here?” The rich young ruler comes to Jesus and asks him a wonderful question, and Jesus’ response was, “What the scripture says.” It’s just over and over, Jesus asks more questions than he made statements.

Brian: Jesus often asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Neil: Yeah. To the blind man. To us that would be pretty obvious.

Brian: Yeah, well we assume, again to us as coaches, maybe our assumption is wrong of what they want.

Neil: Yes, that’s true.

Brian: Neil, you’re just full of fantastic information, and what I haven’t got at is what you might offer to folks if they were interested.

Neil: Yes, we’ve just developed a two-day seminar. It’s fifteen hours of training and then additional hours afterward, four hours additional by telephone. The purpose of the seminar is to help people use coaching principles in their discipleship. It’s based on a format, a framework, that has been used in the business world with great success of teaching managers these coaching principles that have made huge differences. We’ve taken that framework and, realizing that it is so applicable for disciples in church and developing this ministry, this program, that we will allow people to use this tool in discipling. Personal opinion, and I know that I’m very biased, but I think it is a tool that is missing in most of the discipling that is going on in the United States today.

Brian: I’ve taken a quick peek at it, I’m not that familiar with it, and I was impressed with it immediately that it has what’s missing. Are you teaching this online or are there places people can come?

Neil: We’re setting up areas right now. We’re going to be running our pilot program of this in the next couple of months here. By the middle of August, I would say, it should be available online. We do have a website that should be going up in just a couple of weeks: www.coaching4discipleship.com.

Brian: www.coaching4discipleship.com. We’ll put that on our website.

Neil: Okay, great. That’ll be up in a couple of weeks, and we will see what the Lord does with this. I’m excited about it because I think it’s going to be a way of impacting so many pastors’ desires of discipling their people for Christ.

Brian: Neil, thanks so much for joining us today, and thanks to our listeners for joining us as well. This podcast was sponsored by our certificate in Christian Leadership Coaching. It’s a nine month, ICF-approved coach training program that will help prepare you to coach those around you to set goals, take action, and reach new levels of success. We have a cohort forming in July of 2017, and if you’re listening to this at a later date, there are always cohorts forming so check us out at our website www.coachapproachministries.org/coachnow. We will see you next week!

[Outro Music]