



## Coach Approach Ministries Podcast

### Episode 74: Chad Gets a Doctorate in Positive Psychology

Published: November 16, 2017

**Brian Miller:** As a trained coach, you need to stay sharp. If you don't, you can lose your certification. Our advanced coaching courses provide the development you need to expand your skills, tackle specific coaching issues, and get the continuing education you need to stay sharp and stay certified. In the first few months of 2018, Coach Approach Ministries is offering four advanced classes. One is *A Coach Approach to Change, Transition, and Transformation*. The second one is *The Language of Coaching*. The third, *Coaching and Positive Psychology*, and finally, *A Coach Approach to Evangelism and Discipleship*. Go to [www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance](http://www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance) to sign up and keep your coaching skills sharp. Set time aside right now to take your next class, [www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance](http://www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance).

#### [Intro Music]

**Brian:** I'm Brian Miller, Strategic Director for Coach Approach Ministries, CAM for short, and I'm joined here today by Mr. Chad Hall, the president of Coach Approach Ministries. Hey, I know, and I've hinted at this before, you just finished up some doctorate work. Some doctorate work. I don't want to make it sound too important. Some doctorate work.

**Chad Hall:** Just a smidge.

**Brian:** What was your thesis topic?

**Chad:** The thesis for the smidgen of doctorate work that I did.

**Brian:** It was a weekend. Probably a weekend of work.

**Chad:** Actually, just a long Saturday worth of work. No, not so much. Positive psychology. So, what is it? How does it integrate with Christian approaches to helping people live well, and how could people apply it? People meaning pastors, coaches, and counselors. How could they apply some of the lessons of positive psychology? I've got a very brief, 230-page dissertation if you'd like to take a look at that sometime.

**Brian:** Oh, for sure. Just send that into my email if you would, or put it on Facebook.

**Chad:** Just go ahead and put it into [junk@gmail.com](mailto:junk@gmail.com).

**Brian:** No, I think, Chad, when people hear positive psychology, there's at least some people that would say, "That's just wishful thinking, and I'm not into wishful thinking," but I've talked to you enough to know there's a ton of science behind this that has really put it in an important space.

**Chad:** I think a lot of misconceptions about positive psychology... Honestly, one that I had before I really researched it was that kind of wishful thinking, is this kind of new-age-y. People confuse it with positive thinking, like the power of positive thinking.

**Brian:** Right.

**Chad:** Put good vibes into the world, and good things will happen. That kind of stuff. You're right. The real distinction with positive psychology, it's scientific. It's a scientific investigation of what does it mean to live well, and how do we do that?

**Brian:** And how'd you get interested in this topic?

**Chad:** Well, on a personal level, I think everyone wants to live well, and once I realized there was a scientific investigation and evidence, empirical evidence, for what it means to live well and how to do it, that's, I think, inherently pretty interesting, but also, I had a colleague at Western Seminary, Dr. Norm Thiesen, who is part of our counseling faculty. Norm just really saw, he has a deep appreciation of coaching, and he said, "Chad, positive psychology is the bridge between counseling and coaching. It's the space we both get to play in, and I think it'd be worth you looking into." At first, I said, "Nah. It sounds like wishful thinking," but once I really gave it a look, I said, "Yeah, that's really intriguing."

**Brian:** The word I think of is joy, and I know that's not going to encompass all this, but as a Christian, as a human being, I want more joy in my life, and it's interesting, as you talked about the bridge between counseling and coaching, counseling makes me think there's something holding me back from joy, and coaching makes me think there are actions I could take to find some joy. Any fairness to that?

**Chad:** Yeah, I think so. I think there's a lot of fairness, and I think both of those are true. There are things that prevent, and there are things that promote.

**Brian:** So, this is certainly a coaching podcast. We're going to talk a lot about positive psychology, but first of all, what would give you a sense in a coaching conversation that we should draw from positive psychology.

**Chad:** I think a couple of things. One is, I think the more we understand about positive psychology, the more it kind of just provides a platform, or a framework, from which we can do better coaching. So, whether we ever bring it up as a topic, whether insights from positive psychology ever show up in the content of our coaching conversation, that's whatever, but it just helps us be more effective as a coach, and we can talk about some of those things. More to your question, I think with a client that's saying kind of what you're saying, a lot more joy, "I'm not as satisfied with life as I thought I'd be. I thought I'd be farther along by now. I feel kind of stuck, and it's a feeling. I'm wondering what is the meaning or purpose in life." Those are all positive psychology topics, and I think having just a little bit of insight from the work of positive psychology could really help us be more effective as coaches when those kind of topics come up.

**Brian:** And maybe not just individual coaching situations, but even with teams. I want our team to have

a better feel to it. It seems like that would be positive psychology.

**Chad:** Yeah, it could be. In fact, some other good research from the field of positive psychology deals with work environments and how to create a more positive work environment where people are more fully engaged, get the best and brightest ideas from people, and what are the things that prevent and get people held back from being their best at work in those team, group settings. So, there's a lot of wisdom and insight from positive psychology that can help facilitate improving working conditions.

**Brian:** So, a key word that I hear in positive psychology is wellbeing. Give us a definition of wellbeing. What are we talking about?

**Chad:** Think about a really deep, robust definition of happiness. Most people, especially Christians, when they hear the word happy, they think this kind of shallow, self-centered, maybe pleasure-based idea of happiness. If you take happiness and say, "What's the kind of happiness that God would really want for us?" We would still recognize it as happiness, you know? It wouldn't be some kind of weird version that wouldn't even equate with happiness. That's really wellbeing. It means not just to do well, not just to have well, but to be well, to be satisfied with life, to enjoy it as you're talking about not necessarily a long string of pleasurable moments, but a satisfaction with life.

**Brian:** I like the idea of satisfaction, of joy, some motivation for the day. There's a lot of good pieces to that. Now, you know, we're a Christian organization. How do you think about wellbeing as a Christian, even from the theology?

**Chad:** Yeah, one thing that really helped me was to realize that Christians have always thought about this, and so, this isn't something we kind of reverse engineer and find in the bible. Maybe if we look under the right rocks, or if we reinterpret it in some kind of weird or wacky way. As I was telling some folks in a class a few weeks ago, you take the topic of happiness, it's the very first topic Saint Augustine wrote on after his conversion. You've got to think, maybe the theologian, the first post-biblical theologian, what was so important to him that it was the first thing he wrote on as a Christian? It was a short treatise on happiness. It's the last thing C.S. Lewis wrote on. Lots of theologians, lots of Christian thinkers in between. One thing I think we have to do as Christians is say this matters. It matters to God, it matters to us. People have thought about it. They've thought about it for thousands of years. It's a good thing. It's not a secular concept. However, Christian ideas of happiness and wellbeing do differ from secular approaches, and it's not that there's one secular approach. There's lots of them. Some of them integrate more with Christian theology than others, but one of the best resources I've found to really describe the good idea of Christian wellbeing, I won't go into too many details here, but it offers a threefold framework, and what God wants from us as people is he wants us to experience peace, a shalom peace, a deep sense of peace with ourselves, with others, with God. Not just the absence of conflict, but real harmony. That kind of peace.

**Brian:** I think of Paul when he said, "I know what it's like to be in all kinds of situations, and I found a way to be content."

**Chad:** That's important. Another is blessing. God wants to bless us. He wants us to experience the blessings that come from rightful living and applying his wisdom in the world. That can be the blessing of positive emotions. It can be the blessing of good relationships. It can be the blessing of provision. You're not going to have wellbeing apart from blessing. The third concept is that of wholeness, or integrity.

[Transcribed by Alyssa Miller](#)

That we are well integrated as a person. We know who we are, through and through, and we can show up as that person in authentic ways versus a dis-integrated person. So, those are three concepts you see in the old testament and the new testament, peace, blessing, and wholeness.

**Brian:** So, you were talking about integration. Let's dig into that a little bit. How do you begin to take these big concepts and begin to integrate them into the life of a Christian, and we're talking about coaching, so maybe into the life of a client?

**Chad:** One way is to just kind of know that is the goal we're aiming for. You wonder how should life work? Well, a good life is a life of peace, blessing, and wholeness. That means that it's not a life of a lot of other things. So just aiming at the right target is the biggest thing. It's the best way to integrate this. A good life isn't one that's aimed at status, or fame, or wealth. Those aren't bad things. They're not the center of the bullseye, though. That's the funnest things I've learned in positive psychology. Where does happiness and wellbeing come from? Circumstances do contribute somewhat to our sense of happiness, just not very much. Like 10% would be circumstance. Circumstance meaning our level of wealth, how nice of a house do we live in, do we have a job that we find satisfying? Those kinds of things.

**Brian:** Well I know the statistics on wealth to some extent. There's certainly an increase in personal yearly salary up to, you know the numbers, up to 60; \$70,000. You certainly do see some happiness, wellbeing because there's less stress. There's things you can do to make things easier, but then after 80; 90,000; \$100,000 a year, there is almost no indication of more happiness above what might be considered a middle-class salary.

**Chad:** That's right. In the US, somewhere in the mid-70s, you've just got this tipping point where you get diminishing returns, precipitously diminishing returns after that, and one of my favorite studies compared people who won the lottery with people who became paraplegic.

**Brian:** It's not funny in some ways, but would you rather win the lottery or become a paraplegic? I mean certainly everyone is going to say, "I would rather win the lottery." Now, I know there's problems with that, but I'd certainly rather win the lottery than become a paraplegic.

**Chad:** Everyone instinctively would say... By the way, that's probably a good choice for most people would be the lottery, if you had to choose, but the research looked at how did each of those circumstances affect the person's happiness, satisfaction with life, sense of wellbeing. To begin with, winning the lottery had a very positive impact. A year out, almost no impact. As you can imagine, some people were even less happy a year out after winning the lottery.

**Brian:** This is why I don't play the lottery. Literally, I don't play the lottery because I feel... I think in my head how I'm going to spend it, but I never buy a ticket because I know this would be the quickest ticket to unhappiness that I could possibly buy.

**Chad:** That's right because I would show up in your driveway tomorrow with my hat in my hand.

**Brian:** "Hey, Brian!" And you'd have to get in line.

**Chad:** I'm so far away, it wouldn't be a line by the time I got there. The contrast is, you become paralyzed. Obviously, they didn't have a control group for this. They didn't intentionally inflict it, but they looked at people who had become paralyzed with an accident or disease. Immediately after,

they're far less happy. It has a very negative impact, but a year out, no impact. In fact, some of them reported being happier a year later. For just daily living, should you buy a lottery ticket? No. If your goal is to be more satisfied with life, to have a better sense of wellbeing, and to be just flat out happier, will the lottery ticket get you there? No. Will the bigger salary get you there?

**Brian:** People think so.

**Chad:** People think so.

**Brian:** But no.

**Chad:** There are two broad approaches to wellbeing. One is just hedonism. That is just pleasure. So, a happy life is one of pleasure. My favorite quote on that is from Don Draper from the TV show *Mad Men*. He says, "What is happiness? It's that moment right before you need more happiness." Of course that's a great ad man right there, but that's the hedonistic approach. The other approach is more of a being approach, a Greek term. I think it's eudaimonism, and it comes from this to be a good spirit. It basically means instead of having good experiences, pleasures, to be a good person, to be a certain kind of person, and winning the lottery, or being paralyzed, or whatever, doesn't really affect who you are, and who you are is really the path to wellbeing.

**Brian:** So what are a couple of ways, if I want to be more content, from your vast learning, your long Saturday...

**Chad:** Many, many Saturdays.

**Brian:** Many Saturdays. What are a couple things that you really latched onto and said, "That just makes sense."

**Chad:** One, you cannot overestimate the importance of relationships. Now, not every relationship contributes to wellbeing. There are dysfunctional, destructive, polluting, toxic relationships, but relationships that promote and value your virtues, your intrinsic dignity and worth and promote you becoming a more virtuous person. You cannot overestimate the importance of that for your wellbeing. Having a community of support. Whether it's family, friends, church, neighborhood, it's unbelievable. I'll give an example of this. One of my favorite showed an hour of influence from people around you. If you have a friend who smokes, it's very likely that you smoke. If you have a friend who doesn't smoke, but their friend smokes, so that's two degrees of separation, it's still more likely that you smoke. If you have a friend who doesn't smoke who has a friend who doesn't smoke, but the friend's friend smokes, three degrees of separation, it still influences the fact that you most likely smoke. What?

**Brian:** What if Kevin Bacon smokes?

**Chad:** Then it depends. If you're six degrees of separation, then no, it's not going to have any influence.

**Brian:** People say, and I don't think it's scientific, but you are the five people you hang around with the most. There is some accuracy to that, and not only the five people you hang around the most, but who they hang around the most. There's a sense of that broadness of community that keeps working its way out that affects you.

**Chad:** Along that same thing, happiness. If you have a friend who's happy, or a friend who has a friend

who's happy, or a friend who has a friend who has a friend who's happy, if you do the third degree, so having a friend of a friend of a friend who's happy contributes to your own happiness more than \$10,000. So, it kind of gets back to that point, how little money contributes to our happiness, but how much relationships do. Choose who you hang out with wisely, and value relationships. That's a huge piece of it.

**Brian:** So, relationships. What else?

**Chad:** So, relationships are really key. Some other things that you could do to really promote your own personal wellbeing that are really key... One would be what I would call emotional attitudes. In some ways, emotions are our response to what's going on, but at a deeper level, we can have these patterned emotional attitudes. For instance, if you look on the past with regret, remorse, that's going to put you in a bad place. Ruminating, it doesn't do any good. It's terribly stressful. If you look on the past with gratitude, there's tons of research about the power of gratitude for promoting wellbeing. Similarly, if you look into the future with an attitude of anxiety, worry, that's of course very stressful, very debilitating, especially in contrast to looking into the future with optimism and hope which are emotional attitudes. You're taking an emotion and using that as a filter by which you view the future. Boy, hope and optimism are really powerful, and even in the present, within in the present you tend to experience emotions of anger, fear, hatred, disgust. Contrast that with emotional attitudes of love, peace, curiosity, hope, awe, savoring the positive things that are happening in the moment, big time contribution to emotional happiness.

**Brian:** I'm thinking about the scripture in, boy I don't want to get this wrong, in Hebrews, whatever is noble, think about those things. To think about honorable things is going to help you with your own wellbeing. Take some time to reflect, to journal, just on noble things, and something else I do is I yell at people in my head, and I don't know if that fits in to what you're getting at, but I think that's probably what I should stop doing. Maybe spend more time reflecting on noble things.

**Chad:** It's interesting that scripture actual commands these things. When you think that scripture commands gratitude, commands love, commands hope, and faith, this is God's way of wise living.

**Brian:** This idea of strong relationships, positive emotions, what else?

**Chad:** Another big one is the power of having meaning and purpose in life. So, people who people who wander through they, they don't do very well, and they're not very happy with life. They're not very happy with themselves. People who understand themselves to be in a story of meaning, and purpose, and headed somewhere, they tend to do much better in life. Not only do they fight off depression more, but they have much higher indications of what we would call flourished in life. So, having a well-formed idea of what life is about and a sense of meaning and purpose, super important.

**Brian:** I think even as God put Adam in the garden in the beginning, Eden. He didn't just say, "Have fun." He gave him a real sense of purpose, and I tend to think, it's hard to prove just absolutely scripturally, but there are hints, that we'll have stuff to do in heaven. Even in heaven, where we think we'll have the most wellbeing that we could possibly imagine, I think we will have relationships, this idea of some noble thoughts, and purpose. That all rings really true to me, Chad.

**Chad:** It's interesting, one of the other things with positive psychology is to study engagement, just

having something to do, having meaningful work, boy, it's important for mental health and wellbeing. It makes us happy to have something purposeful to do. So, not just a purpose in life, but purposeful activity right here, right now. Whereas we think the good life would be life on a cruise ship. I wouldn't have to do anything. Everything was provided, and the research shows that is not a good life, that is a boring life, and boredom is a rabbit hole into destruction. So, having something meaningful, purposeful that you can engage in in a regular way, really important. Even to have a sense of achievement and accomplishment is really important.

**Brian:** I hesitate to ask, and I'll even offer, I rarely do this, offer to edit this out depending on your answer. You studied this for at least three, four, five years. How has this impacted you?

**Chad:** Well, it has impacted me. What started off as an arms-length level. This would be interesting to look at. It kind of forced me, I would say, to look at my own sense of wellbeing, and what was helpful was it gave me handles to look at. Okay, how emotionally positive am I? It has really helped me the last several years to notice when I'm being negatively emotional with myself, with others, having those arguments in my head, and to think not only does this displease God, which is the category I had before, but this is detrimental to me. It's harmful to me. So, I was like, "Oh. That's different." I think it's helped me value relationships a lot more, whereas, I think before I had more of this John Wayne, independent, strong people don't need others and realizing that's stupid, and that's not very helpful. To have a good life means to have friends, family, strong relationships. It's really impacted how I approach those kinds of things.

**Brian:** That's beautiful. Well, congratulations on completing your work, and thanks for taking some time to share that with us today.

**Chad:** My pleasure, Brian, and this was fun because we have a good relationship, so you promote my own happiness and wellbeing.

**Brian:** Boom! I like it.

**Chad:** How about that?

**Brian:** Thanks, Chad.

As a trained coach, you need to stay sharp. If you don't, you can lose your certification. Our advanced coaching courses provide the development you need to expand your skills, tackle specific coaching issues, and get the continuing education you need to stay sharp and stay certified. In the first few months of 2018, Coach Approach Ministries is offering four advanced classes. One is *A Coach Approach to Change, Transition, and Transformation*. The second one is *The Language of Coaching*. The third, *Coaching and Positive Psychology*, and finally, *A Coach Approach to Evangelism and Discipleship*. Go to [www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance](http://www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance) to sign up and keep your coaching skills sharp. Set time aside right now to take your next class, [www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance](http://www.coachapproachministries.org/coachadvance).

**[Outro Music]**