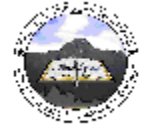




On The Frontier



“For The Glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel”

Vol X No.1

January/February 2002

FOCUS

Over the years I've had many opportunities to coach and be coached. As with most of us, my first interaction with a coach was sports related. Or so I thought at the time.

In high school we had numerous coaches and assistant coaches. Since most of our sports tended to be seasonal, some of our coaches worked with more than one team. But only one at a time. Of course there were those who were luminaries in a particular sport, e.g. the football coach, the basketball coach and the baseball coach. Each of these individuals tended solely to “their” sport, alternating their duties off season by teaching classes on fitness and health. In addition to extra curricula activities all were involved, to some degree, in our physical education program.

Since athletics were deemed of such grave importance much credence was given to our coaching staff. Today, it seems, this is still true. At present our collages have remarkable teams and have had for many years. Their level of play rivals that of the professionals, as does the quality of their coaching.

High school and college coaches lay the ground work for tomorrow's Olympians and professionals. The truth is, most successful athletes were impeccably groomed, nurtured, challenged and motivated by their high school and or college coaches. This is equally true for both amateur and professional alike.

Good coaching is an integral part of every success story and for the student athlete a huge part of the academic experience. I still remember most lessons and encounters verbatim. Coaches make such an impact on us that many occupy the hallowed halls of both history and fame. So revered are these individuals that volumes have been written highlighting their words and accomplishments. Their insight has been immortalized by quotes so impacting as to become part of our vernacular. Many of them are nothing short of cultural icons. Knute Rockne is an excellent example. I'm reminded of the phrase “Win one for the Gipper.” Rockne was the man who discovered and coached the most dazzling, dramatic, idolized athlete of all time, George Gipp. Gipp's running, passing, kicking, and generalship lifted Notre Dame to fame. Gipp also became Notre Dame's first All-American and famous for Rockne's motivating half-time locker room speech, “Win one for the Gipper”. So dynamic was this half-time speech as to inspire former President Ronald Reagan (the oldest living American President) to the degree that he, Mr. Reagan is known as “The Gipper.” Rockne coached the Notre Dame football team when Notre Dame was a small school and football helmets were made of leather. Yet, his legend lives dynamically in this high tech “information age” of ours. As does that of Vince Lombardi (Green Bay Packers), Angelo Dundee (Muhammad Ali's coach), Bela Karolyi (world renowned Olympic gymnastics coach) and many, many others. These people are as synonymous to their fields as Kleenex

is to tissue, Prestone to antifreeze and Frigidaire to refrigerators. Coaching is an all vital aspect of life but it does not begin with sports, nor is it limited to them.

God allegorizes this reality when referencing the redemption that He purchased for us with the precious blood of His Son.

Galatians 4:1-7

Now I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The above passage is referring to an heir of royalty. Even princes and princesses need tutors and governors. None of us were exempt from tutelage.

My mother was my first coach and I also remember vividly the coaching of my Nanny. Oh yes, she was there to coach me when life seemed toughest. I beg the indulgence of my female readers as pertains to my prior listing of male coaches and not female. To be sure there are more female coaches than I could count and there's not a man alive who has not been under the wing of at least one. In truth, women impact all of society and that from the womb. There's much truth to the saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." Not every culture is driven by men, there are those that are matriarchal in practice.

Beyond and before human associations, all of us have been under the wing of our Heavenly Father and that since before we had cognition.

Psalms 139:7-18

Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
or whither shall I flee from thy
presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art*
there: if I make my bed in hell,
behold, thou *art there*.

*If I take the wings of the morning,
and dwell in the uttermost parts of
the sea;*

Even there shall thy hand lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, Surely the darkness shall
cover me; even the night shall be
light about me.

Yea, the darkness hideth not from
thee; but the night shineth as the

day: the darkness and the light *are*
both alike *to thee*.

For thou hast possessed my reins:
thou hast covered me in my
mother's womb.

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made: marvellous
are thy works; and that my soul
knoweth right well.

My substance was not hid from
thee, when I was made in secret,
and curiously wrought in the lowest
parts of the earth.

Thine eyes did see my substance,
yet being imperfect; and in thy
book all *my members* were written,
which in continuance were
fashioned, when *as yet there was*
none of them.

How precious also are thy thoughts
unto me, O God! how great is the
sum of them!

If I should count them, they are
more in number than the sand:
when I awake, I am still with thee.

When faced with life's tough situation
we are inclined to revert back to our
previous teachings. What better place
to go when challenged than to God?

Psalms 17:8

Keep me as the apple of the eye,
hide me under the shadow of thy
wings,

Of course God doesn't have wings
and He surely doesn't have an apple
in His eye. These are figures designed
by God to make the truth more vivid.
The "apple of the eye" is an oriental
representation of the pupil. We all
know how sensitive and delicate that
is. Our eyelids are framed with lashes
having the express purpose of
protecting the eye. They serve as an

"early warning" system causing the
lid to close almost involuntarily at the
slightest hint of invasion. To keep as
the apple of the eye means to guard
carefully and diligently from harm of
any kind. In short, you simply don't
allow ANYTHING to touch your eye.
Not without your personal approval.
As to "hiding under the shadow of
His wings," this in reference to
safety. A mother bird will draw her
young and vulnerable brood under
her wings when ever harm threatens.
This is also the way she keeps them
warm, nurtured and safe. The
Psalmist was saying, "Hide me from
harm and protect me with your
Divine presence. Nurture and care
for me, keep me warm and safe."
Truly, this is a wonderful Psalm!

God certainly is the greatest of all
coaches. And those who serve Him
are commanded to coach His people
in a manner reflective of His Word.

I Peter 5:1-7

The elders which are among you I
exhort, who am also an elder, and a
witness of the sufferings of Christ,
and also a partaker of the glory
that shall be revealed:

Feed the flock of God which is
among you, taking the oversight
thereof, not by constraint, but
willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of
a ready mind;

Neither as being lords over *God's*
heritage, but being ensamples to
the flock.

And when the chief Shepherd shall
appear, ye shall receive a crown of
glory that fadeth not away.

Likewise, ye younger, submit
yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all
of you be subject one to another,
and be clothed with humility: for

God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

We have wonderful reasons for being subject to those who fill that criteria. We are so blessed!

Clearly, there's much more to that passage in Peter than we're going to explore at this time. But, there's no denying the practical worth of coaching someone in the way that is right. All of us need the coaching of God, which can only be found in His Word. The world does offer direction, but it and its results differ greatly from God's.

Psalms 1:1-3

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Some examples of coaching:

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

I Thessalonians 2:11

As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children,

How beautiful that the Apostle Paul was guided to use the analogy of the father and child relationship. The father (and of course the mother) would be responsible not only to teach their children but to train them as well. The difference between teaching and training is simple:

To teach is to impart knowledge.

To train is to monitor the progress of the student to the end that the knowledge imparted is applied correctly.

In parenting, training is essentially the molding of character. Our children will have many teachers but scant few trainers (coaches). The parents should be the most involved coaches their children will ever have, second only to God. If the parents have taught their children correctly, the path of righteousness will be clear and fellowship with God will be sweet.

Proverbs 1:7-17

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause:

Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit:

We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil:

Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse:

My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:

For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.

Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.

There's not a bird alive that will walk into a visible snare. And no human will either. It's up to the parents to see to it that the snares of the world are uncovered. The same can be said for our preachers and teachers. They too must uncover the snare of the Adversary by the teaching and preaching of God's Word.

Considering the multitude of advantages most of us have been given by God and man, it would seem a simple matter to excel. That is, if we have been coached in such various ways we should be champions. Well we can be, and should be, champions. The sobering reality is, we don't all realize our goals. First of all we must consider how that some seem to be coached more than others. Plus, there are many who are never afforded a "fair" start. This is because there is a devil. The Enemy will do his level best to "steal, kill and destroy." So yes, there are some who are sadly underprivileged in this regard. But what about those who have had all the advantages of good coaching? This brings me to the topic of this article, FOCUS. Ask any coach and they will tell you the one thing even the most talented young athletes tend to lack is FOCUS. Seemingly this faculty of mind becomes more meaningful with

age. It is therefore, a delicate trial for a young athlete to survive the rigors of competition. A coach must help the trainee to be mindful of and develop FOCUS. Without it failure is assured. Maybe not right away but sooner or later defeat will be “knocking at the door.”

This translates remarkably well into Christian living. You cannot live a holy lifestyle when you are distracted by the world. This is why the Devil has an endless stream of suggestions ready for you. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to get focused and stay that way. Focus, focus, focus. Very important! This is of course a mental exercise and as such a faculty of the mind. As with all of our faculties we may expand them with use or debilitate them by neglect.

Consider this:

Proverbs 23:7a

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he:

As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. This is an extremely powerful truth. You can change what you are by what you have in your heart. This type of change demands focus.

Proverbs 4:23

Keep [guard] thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.

We are to guard our hearts! Why? Because what we have in our lives has emanated from our hearts. Truly we live life from the inside out and not from the outside in.

Read what Jesus had to say on the subject:

Matthew 12:35

A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good

things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Mark 7:18-23

And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him;

Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?

And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

If we want to change our lives we must change our hearts. In order to do this we must be focused. Focused on God and His Word and NOT on the things of the world.

Psalms 57:7

My heart is fixed [*koon* = stable, firm, established], O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.

If you want to praise God your heart must be fixed. The way we use the word “fix” today is quite different from the way they it was used when the King James Version was completed. Today when we use this word we mean “repair.” That is not the meaning of the Hebrew word from which this word was translated. The Hebrew word means established,

firm, not movable. In some ways our use of English has retained the original meaning of this word “fix,” but when reading this verse we lose it. However, if you think of a lighting fixture or wall fixtures (used to fasten things securely in place) you should get the correct sense. Our hearts MUST be firmly secured on God and His Word if we are to give Him praise.

II Chronicles 12:14

And he did evil, because he prepared [*koon*] not his heart to seek the LORD.

The individual mentioned in the above verse did evil because his heart was not fixed. He did not focus on God and His Word. Ezra focused:

Ezra 7:10

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Consider the guidance God gave Timothy by way of Paul:

I Timothy 4:16

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

We would be well advised to take heed unto ourselves by focusing on the doctrine of God’s Word and the performance of it. This will benefit both us and those to whom we minister. Focus then is all important.

Consequently, the Adversary will do whatever he can to cause you to be distracted and lose focus. This may come to you in one of two avenues, pressure or pleasure.

Many people never consider the “positive” things they are involved

with as thwarting them from pursuing the Word of Life. But, the man engrossed in recreational pursuits will find himself doing little if anything to further his spiritual growth. Why? Because he is busily enhancing his secular interests. The business market today has shorter work weeks and longer vacations than when I took my first job. I've witnessed the change from a dedicated work ethic to an obsession with entertainment. At the same time the pressures of a rising cost of living have caused many to work weekends and overtime. Work is good and God expects that we do some. But never at the expense of His Word! What do I mean? Well, most people used to have weekends off so they could spend time with their families. Family time is vital. Central to this time was a visit to Church. It became so much a part of culture as to be synonymous with Sunday (Remember the antifreeze, kleenex and refrigerator?). The association between Sunday, family and Church is still with us today (if only in name). What? You don't like my use of Sunday or Church? Don't you think I know that God isn't a respecter of days and times? I know that Sunday isn't the Lord's day or anything like that. Or is it the word Church that you don't like? Is fellowship better? The point is, if you don't set aside time for you and your family to hear the Word together it just isn't going to happen. If it doesn't happen it's very unlikely that any of you will have a fixed heart. Hearing the Word is a presupposition to doing it. Or you could be distracted by your job and your bills, the choice is always yours. But one thing is for sure, you cannot be both distracted and focused at the same time. It's one or the other as they are mutually exclusive of each other. They are antithetical like hot and cold or wet and dry. Can't be both, either or!

Focus is not an option if we want to be delivered and see the power of God in our lives.

The following records this principle evidenced in a life or death situation:

Luke 8:40-ff 40

And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people *gladly* received him: for they were all waiting for him.

And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house:

For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.

And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any,

Came behind *him*, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanch'd.

And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press *thee*, and sayest thou, Who touched me?

And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.

And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.

And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.

While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's *house*, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.

But when Jesus heard *it*, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.

And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden.

And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.

And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.

And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise.

And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.

And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.

What a magnificent record!

Apparently the deliverance of Jairus' daughter hinged upon him believing. Those who came from his house with news of her death brought also the potential to fear. These two, fear and believing, are antithetical. Fear and believing cannot be simultaneously applied to a single issue of the heart. One is wrong the other right. Fear is a negative distraction, one which

causes us to lose our focus on the promises of God. As soon as Jesus heard the word spoken by those who came to Jairus he said, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole." He, Jairus was coached by the Master right there on the spot. What an incredible experience that must have been! How so like the Devil to bring evil distractions to the mind of Jairus. How wonderful of our Savior to inspire the man to believe!!!

That is the way it works. We must use our freedom of will to focus our minds. This is not something God can do for us and it is in no way automatic. Too many people think that when they become "born again" they become instruments of God's pleasure. One simple word should remind us how it really is . . . disciple. To be a disciple requires discipline, which is a product of focus.

Many years ago I learned the following:

THE BURDEN OF TEACHING IS ON THE TEACHER BUT THE BURDEN OF LEARNING IS ON THE STUDENT.

How very true that is! It is up to us to focus on the tasks at hand. All the coaching in the world cannot do it for us. A coach can remind us, inspire us and teach us but no coach (not even God) can focus for us. The lack of focus has plagued man with failure upon failure even as the old adage reminds us; "He who shoots at nothing shall surely hit it."

There has never been one goal, aspiration or dream that has been realized without focus. It is a compulsory prerequisite for success.

Perhaps you've noticed how unsettling it is to be distracted. Memory fails and things go undone. People are

overlooked and problems mount. All because of a lack of focus. We all need focus yet we are daily presented a myriad of distractions. Distraction leads to bewilderment and confusion. Focus leads to confidence and peace.

Isaiah 26:3

Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind is stayed on *thee*: because he trusteth in thee.

The above verse is the grandest archetype of focus I know. What should we exchange for perfect peace? The question is of course rhetorical. None of us would ever knowingly give up peace much less perfect peace. The Adversary knows this which is why he goes about it secretly. His endless suggestions provide the fodder for us to be distracted. The answer to this dilemma is the renewed mind. A renewed mind is a focused mind. A mind that is focused on God and His Word is a stable, peaceful, happy mind.

Romans 8:5-7

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace [a peaceful life].

Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

What would you rather have, a peaceful life or death? Not much of a choice eh? Quite a contrast. Why, there's just no comparison at all. A spiritual mind is a mind that rewards its owner with a peaceful life. When all is said and done that's really what everybody wants anyway.

Now I'd like to help you obtain renewed mind focus. Here's how:

1. Study the Word (not what people say about it) rather than other material. Secular material is most often contrary to God's Word.

In journalism schools they teach you to report negative news. In public relations classes they teach you to make positive reports so as to offset negative reports by the media and others.

The word gospel means "good news." We are God's public relation people. Get rid of other material for three months. Study the Gospel of God!

I Timothy 2:15

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Colossians 1:9,10

For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

You can't walk worthy if you don't know the Word.

2. Control your thoughts to recognize your position in Christ as a son. Mental practice! FOCUS!!!

****Our God is not too small, only our controlled thinking****

3. Practice the presence of God. Turn your thoughts to Him, pray with your understanding and by speaking in tongues. Be constantly aware of His presence.

Colossians 3:23

And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

You and God make the majority!

4. Live love. The love of God is like a rose with out thorns.

I John 4:7-19

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world.

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

We love him, because he first loved us.

1. Study the Word.
2. Control your thoughts.
3. Practice the presence of God.
4. Live Love.

Perhaps you've noticed how important adequate lighting is to good vision. God is light! His Word is our lamp.

Psalms 119:105

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Focus on God and His Word and you will see clearly, al the way to victory!

Psalms 36:9

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.
