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COACHING

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Christ-Centered COACHING

7 Benefits for
Ministry Leaders

JANE CRESWELL



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*To my parents,
Franklin and Neva Aiken,
who started me on the journey of following Jesus*

and

*To the farmer and his wife,
Charles and Peggy Creswell,
who inspired me to become a missionary to the corporate world
while I was a summer missionary.*

What a gift it is to have two sets of Christian parents!

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Editor's Foreword

Inspiration and Wisdom for Twenty-First-Century Christian Leaders

You have chosen wisely in deciding to study and learn from a book published in **The Columbia Partnership Leadership Series** with Chalice Press. We publish for

- Congregational leaders who desire to serve with greater faithfulness, effectiveness, and innovation.
- Christian ministers who seek to pursue and sustain excellence in ministry service.
- Members of congregations who desire to reach their full kingdom potential.
- Christian leaders who desire to use a coach approach in their ministry.
- Denominational and parachurch leaders who want to come alongside affiliated congregations in a servant leadership role.
- Consultants and coaches who desire to increase their learning concerning the congregations and Christian leaders they serve.

The Columbia Partnership Leadership Series is an inspiration- and wisdom-sharing vehicle of The Columbia Partnership, a community of Christian leaders who are seeking to transform the capacity of the North American Protestant church to pursue and sustain vital Christ-centered ministry. You can connect with us at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org.

Primarily serving congregations, denominations, educational institutions, leadership development programs, and parachurch organizations, the Partnership also seeks to connect with individuals, businesses, and other organizations seeking a Christ-centered spiritual focus.

We welcome your comments on these books, and we welcome your suggestions for new subject areas and authors we ought to consider.

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Thank you, Lord. May you be the one glorified.

CHAPTER 1

Why *Christ-Centered* Coaching?

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

MARK 12:28–31

Love the Lord your God with *all your strength*. Wow, what a daunting task! A little thought about it may at first evoke more questions than answers. What exactly does it mean? How do you love the Lord with strength?

Surely strength as it's used here doesn't mean muscle. If so, many of us are in big trouble! With our limited physical ability and endurance, most of us wouldn't have much love to give if loving with all our strength meant muscle.

But if the meaning of *strength* is expanded to include all the gifts, talents, skills, personality traits, cognitive preferences—all the characteristics that contribute to making each individual a unique being created in God's image—then that's a concept each of us can embrace. Yet even that expanded definition of strength continues to lead to questions.

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How can you know what your strengths are—all those gifts, talents, skills, personality traits, cognitive preferences—all those bits that are uniquely you? That process could take a lifetime to explore and discover. You can take an endless variety of assessment tests to gain some awareness and understanding of all those characteristics, but then what would you do with all that information?

What if you change over time? How would that affect loving God with all your strength? Would your love for him change, too?

And what about that word *all*? That would mean you couldn't love God with all your strength if any part of you—your gifts, talents, skills, personality traits, cognitive preferences—didn't unite in loving God. That would mean that you have no gift; no talent; no part of personality; no left-, right-, front-, or back-brain activity that isn't dedicated to loving the Lord.

Sounds overwhelming, doesn't it? But Jesus didn't offer the Great Commandment as an option. It's not a choice. It's a command.

You as a ministry leader probably know well the overwhelming feeling of working out of all your strength—loving God and loving others. The pressures in the church today are tremendous. At least, that's what current statistics and ministry leaders themselves are saying. Let's take a look at the current state of the local church in the world today.

What's the Problem?

In the United States today church membership is declining in most denominations. Individual attendance is declining, as well as the number of hours individuals are willing to give to the church each week. Many ministers conduct a lot more funerals than baptisms and weddings in their churches. When worship leaders look out across their congregations on Sunday morning, many see a lot more wrinkles and gray hair than squirming youngsters and whispering teenagers.

That congregational mix and their dedicated time and money mean fewer lay leaders to carry the load. Many of the faithful are getting too old to teach active children or identify with teenagers and young adults. As the leaders of the past are dying off, fewer adults in succeeding generations are stepping up to take their place.¹

Among the younger adults who do attend, fewer are willing to commit to the demands of the jobs they are asked to do. Teaching Sunday school means not only hours of weekly preparation but also a commitment to attend every Sunday. Serving on committees or teams often means long hours of meetings and little real ministry. Program organizations of the past just don't inspire young adults to

commit to such leadership positions. Every year it's harder for churches to fill the jobs template with adults who will say yes.

And then we face the challenge of those outside the church. If people inside the church struggle with the church's value and relevancy in their own lives, for many outside the church it's not even an issue.² In fact, many people today are turned off by Christianity! They find it—or at least their image of it strongly influenced by the media—arrogant, judgmental, and archaic.³ Yet Jesus, in addition to the Great Commandment, left the church with the Great Commission—go, teach, baptize (Matthew 28:18–20). That means telling the unchurched about their need for a Savior in ways that they can hear it and actually attract them to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Many church leaders find themselves exhausted with their seemingly futile attempts to rally the flock, frustrated by the demands of aging buildings and bodies, desperate to meet a budget, and overstressed by congregational and community demands. In the face of all this, many ministers are deciding to seek easier ways to earn a living.⁴ They especially choose an alternate path if it means more time with family and less stress over seemingly impossible tasks and a lack of answers to impossible challenges.⁵

Why Are So Many Churches and So Many Ministers Facing These Challenges Today?

The mix of causes is probably unique in every situation. The many reasons given for the state of the church and ministry today include:

Postmodernism—The postmodern environment has changed our culture.⁶ People with this mind-set question everything. They are not automatically ready to consider the Bible to have absolute truth, for they think much of truth is relative. They demand interactivity, and that includes learning, worship, and ministry activities.⁷ Giving money so someone else can go to Africa makes no sense to them. Sitting in a meeting when they could be painting a widow's house seems pointless. Will the church have to write off people of a postmodern mind-set? The church has endured two thousand years of cultural changes that were as challenging as this one, yet it has persisted and grown. No, I don't believe that postmodernism alone can be the cause for the state of the church today. While it may contribute to the downfall of some churches, many will survive the transition as they shift some of their approaches to worship, ministry, missions, and Christian education. Those who make the transition well will thrive in this changing era.

Lack of leadership—The church not only faces a postmodern era but also one that has lost its zeal for denominationalism or even Bible

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knowledge.⁸ The average adult in the pew has limited understanding of the polity of the church or its denomination and probably little interest. Few systems for teaching the Bible are actually geared toward the ways in which adults learn effectively. These deficits lead to struggles, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings when discussions arise about membership and leadership expectations and requirements. As a result, those who are willing to lead are often unqualified and untrained.

Lack of leadership has often put even more responsibility, time demands, and frustration on ministers. Add to that the idea many laypeople have that ministers were hired to do the work of the church, and they, the members, should not be expected to take on such demands on their time, energy, or finances.⁹

Ultimately, the demand on ministers is to cast a vision that will inspire members to follow, committing their resources to join in reaching the goals to make the vision a reality.¹⁰ Then those who respond to the vision must be taught, equipped, trained, motivated, and encouraged. Somewhere along the line, this breaks down in many churches and adds to the pressure on many pastors and staff ministers.

Untapped potential—Perhaps the adults in your church aren't just lazy or undisciplined, lacking commitment. Perhaps many are loving with something less than all their strength—living in the “not-all” state; they haven't yet determined to love God with all their strength. They may not know how. They may not know how their gifts, talents, and skills can be used in ministry. They may hear the sermon on Sunday but have a total disconnect on their role in the Kingdom—on Sunday, Monday, or any other day. They may dwell on the edge of the Kingdom but have no idea how they could make a contribution to it.

What will it take for laypeople to get a vision of their role as Christ's followers in terms of ministry both inside and outside the church? What more would it demand from ministers today? Aren't most ministers in the “all” state, giving everything they've got in service and love for God and his people? Maybe, maybe not. Untapped potential abounds in laypeople and ministry leaders alike.

Unrealistic expectations—While laypeople often aren't living up to the expectations of ministers, clearly ministers get feedback that they are often not living up to the expectations of their church members.¹¹ When you felt called to ministry, did you ever dream that you would be dealing with some of the tasks and situations—even nightmares—that you're dealing with today? That's one of the reasons some ministers have had enough and are leaving the church. Their calling just didn't include the things that consume their time.

Many ministers are caught in an endless morass of administrative chores, “fire-fighting,” maintaining programs that seem to have lost their energy if not their purpose, and responding to unhappy and needy members. By Sunday they confess that they are just going through the motions. They find themselves in the “not-all” category during worship—the part of their call they value most. Rather than compromise worship and their high calling, many abandon ship.¹² And many who remain in ministry confess feeling more frustration and less joy in ministry than ever before.

Unworthy goals—Has your church ever spent more time and energy than it should on any of these issues: the color of the walls or the carpet, whether to rent or purchase a photocopier, the wording that goes on the church sign, or whether to sponsor a student ski trip? Even more important issues can bog the church down in endless discussion: which curriculum to use, where youth will go on a mission trip, whether to share space with an ethnic or foreign-language congregation, or how to respond to current denominational controversies. Sometimes the harsh words and hurt feelings last a lifetime and seem to negate the ministry goals that began the discussion.¹³

What If?

What if many of these negatives could be turned around?

What if laypeople were to move from the “not-all” to the “all” state? What if their untapped potential could be harnessed and used in Kingdom ministry? What if they became motivated, enthusiastic, totally committed?

What if the church could unite in using its limited resources together in meaningful, focused ways? What if church members began to see results, to get excited about what the church was doing and accomplishing? What if what they experienced in church just kept getting better and better, totally living up to their expectations and engaging them in fulfilling ministry?

What if the structure, the programs, the ministries of the church were organized in a way to maximize the gifts, talents, skills, personalities—the *strengths*—of both ministers and laypeople so that all were united in a common God-given vision?

What if the Great Commission and the Great Commandment became the driving forces for both ministers and lay leaders so that secular people were being attracted to Christ and all members were growing as disciples, united in love for God, for one another, and for those outside the church?

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What if this change occurred not only in your church but in churches throughout your community, your city, your state, the nation? What then could be accomplished for the Kingdom?

What if your church could change? What if your ministry was more often than not one of joy and fulfillment? What if you had dedicated, motivated, equipped leaders lined up waiting for Kingdom assignments?

What if all of this could happen where you are right now?

How Will This Book Help?

Right now, for most ministers and most churches, a large gap separates the reality and the “what-if” columns. While most ministers would like to rewrite those ledger sheets, they probably think it’s impossible. If you are experiencing any of these frustrations, you’re probably thinking:

Yes, but my situation is different. You have no idea what I’ve been through, what I’m going through. You can’t imagine what some of my members are like, what they have done, what they have said to me, how uncommitted, ill-equipped, unmotivated, and helpless they are. You just don’t know how difficult, how impossible, this situation is. I can’t possibly turn it around. There’s no way it can improve. I see no way out but to move or leave the ministry.

Unfortunately, such thoughts, while honest, do little to help the situation.

Tapping the potential pool

Coaching can help.¹⁴ This book has been developed from wide experience in coaching in both the secular and the church context. Many of the principles developed here come from secular coaching experiences. However, the unique focus of this book is applying the strengths of coaching philosophy and practice to Christian experience: the needs of the church, its ministers, and its members. With examples from Scripture referenced frequently, I want to point out opportunities for exercising *a specific type of coaching—Christ-Centered coaching*.

Many of the things that I describe throughout this book as benefits of *Christ-Centered coaching* are also benefits of coaching in general. I have not really put forth the effort to point them out because this book is intended to educate, support, and inspire coaching that is Christ centered.

Christ-Centered coaching focuses on tapping into that great pool of potential in your church. George Bullard uses the phrase “full Kingdom potential.”¹⁵ It’s available in your church. People in your church can move from the “not-all” to the “all” category in loving and serving God. Don’t you want to be there and be a part of tapping into all the skills, talents, gifts, personalities—strengths—lying dormant in your church right now? *Christ-Centered* coaching can help you see this dream come true. Coaching can help you become the key to making it happen in God’s own way.

Christ-Centered coaching is a customized approach to conversations between two individuals who trust God to be a partner in the conversation. I often call myself a “customized adult-learning partner.” A coach can help you discover insights in yourself and your own situation that you never dreamed possible.

Christ-Centered coaching is effective at an organizational level as well as at an individual level. Coaching skills can also be applied to work with groups, committees, and teams for the good of the whole. And through your own coaching experience, you will learn to use these skills with others—one-on-one and in group situations.

Focusing on root causes

Coaching goes beyond surface troubles, whatever they are, to focus on the root cause. Often, the root issues are completely unknown. They lie buried deep inside you. Once revealed, you can learn to deal with, overcome, or channel them.

Some common coaching topics include personal and organizational purpose/mission/vision, leadership development, succession planning, organizational effectiveness, stress management, and barriers to full commitment—just the issues that many ministers are facing in churches and even denominational leadership positions today.

Coaching really fits with the postmodern mind-set. In this relational one-on-one approach, the person being coached—you—will discover your own issues and needs, focus on your concerns, and find your own answers. Coaching offers no package deals, no right answers, no preconceived results. In the process of this experiential dialogue, you will work out of your own way of thinking and operating. This will occur in your personal life and in your ministry. In short, coaching will help you find and address all those things that were potential root causes to the problems you are experiencing. Don’t read this to say that coaching advocates a self-sufficiency in which God is not needed. In reality, it is quite the opposite. *Christ-Centered*

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coaching often causes ministry leaders to renew and deepen their dependence on and relationship with Jesus Christ.

Based on real-life scenarios

To help you see the benefits of coaching, this book will provide real-life scenarios. Some of you may think when you read them that you know exactly who I'm writing about. But you don't, so don't even try to guess their identities. Over the years, I've had a role in either coaching or delivering coach training to more than five hundred ministry leaders. Each scenario is based on a combination of a number of people in ministerial roles who have faced similar situations and had similar experiences and discoveries in the coaching process. In fact, you will surely see yourself in a number of these situations. That's why they're included—to help you see the many benefits of *Christ-Centered* coaching in situations much like yours.

Even in cases in which the experiences described are different from your own, hopefully you will still be able to see how coaching is relevant to a variety of experiences—those you've had and those you are yet to have. The coaching skills portrayed in the scenarios are written at an Associate Certified Coach (ACC) level of coaching competency. That is the first level of coach certification with the International Coach Federation (ICF).¹⁶ The purpose of writing at that level is to model results that can come from a coach who has had coach training and some experience, while also showing you that a coach does not have to be at a mastery level to produce good results.

Confidentiality is at the foundation of coaching.¹⁷ No one's confidentiality is betrayed in this book, and no good coach would ever betray a client's trust. That can't be emphasized too strongly. These stories are real, but in a way they are everyman and everywoman. They are drawn from real life but not from one life. Easily identifiable characteristics have been changed, but the principles remain. These very human stories will touch your heart and soul because they reflect people who have walked where you walk today, often in situations they found frustrating at best and hopeless at their worst.

Who Is the Author?

And finally, who is Jane Creswell, in many ways a product of the corporate world, that I should attempt to help you in a ministry situation? Let me tell you just a little about my own personal journey.

As a summer missionary in college, I worked with migrant children. I noticed that some were very responsive, and some were

difficult to reach. On further investigation, I noticed that those who responded well were attached to farms where the farmer had a reputation for being kind and compassionate to his workers. Those who were unresponsive came from farms where the conditions were harsh and the farmers were taskmasters. I believed the same results would be found in the business world, and that summer I felt God's call to be a missionary in the corporate world. This meant loving God and loving people with all my strength in an environment in which God is often ignored or unwanted. Of course, my self-proclaimed missionary status was unofficial and largely unknown by those with whom I worked.

Ultimately, my corporate experience led to my becoming the first internal coach at IBM and founder of IBM Coaches Network.¹⁸ On this particular part of my journey, I learned a lot about coaching executive leaders and creating a coaching culture within organizations.¹⁹ But my credentials are not only based on that experience. I have also studied coaching and earned the Master Certified Coach distinction from the International Coach Federation. That translates into more than twenty-five hundred contact hours of corporate coaching prior to June 2003.²⁰

I spent several years watching corporate executives respond positively to coaching experiences, even turning around their components or businesses. They found the workplace a healthier, more rewarding place for themselves and for those who worked with them. After these experiences I was invited to apply the same coaching skills in the church environment with ministry leaders in both the church and denominational settings. At first I was reluctant. Having been involved in a church all my life, I have a very high regard for pastors, other ministers, and denominational leaders. I wondered how, coming from a corporate world, I could help them—if indeed they actually needed any help.

Now, after working with church leaders for several years, I understand that ministers, like corporate leaders, deal with similar needs and root causes of frustration. And more than ever before, I am convinced that the approaches of coaching apply and can help people in all walks of life. The difference between the corporate world and the church is the eternal significance of their goals and purposes. Nothing is more important than following the commands of Jesus in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. And *Christ-Centered* coaching, I'm convinced from my own experience, can help you love God—and love people—with *all* your strength.