

How People Grow & Endure Spiritually:

The role of a spiritual coach

People who grow and endure spiritually...

- 1. Get that the gospel is primarily relational, not moral** – “For God so LOVED the world that He gave...” God ultimate goal wasn’t the forgiveness of sin but the restoration of His relationship with us that comes through, as a result of, our forgiveness (John 17:3, Romans 5:1-2, 6-11). We’re saved from sin, but to Him. The “to Him” part is the primary part. If they understand the good news only as a rescue from sin and not as deliverance to God, endurance is very unlikely. In fact, it gets in the way of it. I think it’s probably that God determines something as pure or impure, moral or immoral, based on whether or not it comes between us and Him. That’s what makes something right or wrong instead of just some intrinsic goodness or badness? Maybe something isn’t right because it’s moral, but because it doesn’t diminish our closeness with Him. God’s *primary* purpose (obviously it was a purpose) for sending His Son to earth wasn’t salvation from our sins but restoration to His eternal family – rescue from hell and eternal separation from Him to Heaven with Him forever. There’s a reason for morality and everything religious that God applauds. It’s not arbitrary integrity, purposeless ritual, or goodness for the sake of goodness itself, but love for God. A relationship with God is primary and EVERYTHING else is secondary. Therefore...
- 2. Know that the primary focus of the Christian life should be on God** – Not on not sinning, rules, regulations, traditions or doctrine, except if it brings the heart more fully to Him. That does not mean that any of those things are necessarily wrong, they may even be essential, but they are not primary. Knowledge for the sake of itself, or good works for the sake of religiosity or propriety or exactness or pride or any motive other than a willing choice at first, and then over time for sheer love, is worthless. To focus on not sinning is to make a god of morality, the idolatry of perfection, and leaves us with “damnable good works.” (Timothy Keller) Our heart’s motives behind what we do are more essential to keep properly focused, than the stuff we do. A heart given over completely to God will better insure right actions than right actions will ever insure a pure heart. Take note; that also means that the primary focus should also NOT be on prayer, Bible study, service, giving, compassion or any other means that the enemy can use to dupe people into believing that they have an actual relationship with God. Tools, no matter how crucial to relationship they may be, must never replace God as the focus of our existence or passions. We tend to teach spiritual disciplines as a means for spiritual growth. But we don’t always define spiritual growth as growing closer to God in faith and devotion. We sometimes define it as morality, righteousness, and purity. Again, righteousness and justice and compassion and all the fruits of Spirit are not a bad thing! They just aren’t the main thing. There is a huge difference between the two! Why do you get up in the morning? To make money, pay the bills, get ahead, spread the good news, serve your King, or because you love God and can’t wait to do/live/experience life with Him, which leads to and drive all those other things? The order is of tantamount importance. Spiritually immature Christians usually have them backwards and must at some point make this switch in order to continue to faithfully follow God till the end and to finish well.
- 3. Realize that they alone are responsible for their spiritual development** – They know and accept the seriousness of the truth that they are on the hook for the level of their relationship with God. Not the church, not the pastor, not their Sunday School teacher, and not their small group leader. They know that “being spiritually feed” weekly isn’t nearly as healthy as spiritually feeding themselves (eating) daily. They have not left their vow of devotion and loyalty to God to chance or to some automatic process that they think will magically happen via osmosis over

time, on its own, and with little or no intentionality or effort. They refuse to neglect the truth that all relationships require time alone together. They are cognizant of the fact that head knowledge and/or right actions and dutiful practices won't necessarily build a relationship with God, but may instead construct spiritual pride and the delusion of maturity. They know better than to believe that the sheer love for God that they feel in the beginning will carry them faithfully through to the end. They are on a constant vigil for any idol, even a religious one, that feeds their religious flesh (like their Bibles or ministry) and they act swiftly and violently against it. They are also fully aware that while they are responsible, they are equally unable to do it alone.

- 4. Take spiritual direction wisely along the way** – I believe it's the only way to successfully navigate away from the forms, rituals and expectations of modern Christianity that are not geared toward building a relationship with God. Doubtless it's also the only way to get through ones personal baggage that hinders, or prevent altogether, any real level of closeness with God. Some, but not nearly enough, use a pastoral counselor but few use a spiritual coach, doing spiritual direction, mostly because there are few to be found. The church is full of them I contend; we just don't recognize or even look for them faithfully and aggressively enough.

Spiritual coaches aren't a replacement for God and aren't infallible. However, there is grace from God given to those who place themselves under appropriate authority. A relationship with God means the Holy Spirit is your primary spiritual director and a human one is only useful as they are directed by His as well. There are things that we just can't "see" ourselves, about ourselves, that we need someone else to show/teach us. To use a sports metaphor, we can't analyze our own swing. We don't have the right perspective and trying to changes it. When my wife hems my pants, which at 5'6" she does frequently, she has to tell me not to look down at what she's doing because it throws off her measurements! The same goes for attempts to both analyze our own swing and our relationship with God, and others for that matter!

The help of a spiritual coach is undervalued and underused, and most are worse off for it. For those in a place where this isn't available, God can find a way to make up the difference, but for most disciples who live in a believing community, where the gift is readily present even if not identified, this is the way God has designed it to work. Consider these stories from the Bible: Jethro to Moses (Exodus 18:13-26), Mordecai to Ester (the book of Esther), Samuel to Saul (1Samuel 15:10-31), Nathan to David (2Samuel 12:1-13), Jesus to His disciples (Matthew 5:1ff, and all through the gospels). These are just the ones I thought of off the top of my head. Some of these examples are of spiritual directors giving guidance, others are times they pointed out sins that were being excused and otherwise hidden from. But without an objective perspective from a trusted guide, each one would have been left on their own to muddle along. In King Saul's case, he refused guidance and the story I reference above records the disastrous results.

We'll get coaching in almost every are of life; for our careers, relationships, marriages, sports, hobbies and recreation, physical fitness, medically health, psychological heath... But we don't think to get personal coaching for our spiritual lives. Often because our churches don't encourage or offer it. Counseling usually comes into play only after something has blown up and needs to be repaired, restored, or reverse. The damage is already done, often irreversibly. Coaching however is more comprehensive, because it covers both sides; proactively as a preventative and reactively as a reparative. It covers maintenance and repairs. It deals with incremental improvements and the need for cataclysmic change. It helps folks prevent many relational blow ups and repair them if they do happen. It helps people use what they already have in ways they never dreamed and to be a blessing to others along the way. And when things do go sideways, as they always will, there's someone there to help them make the most of it, if not put it to very good use. That's the role of a spiritual coach