

## The Coaching Voice

### 1 John 5:1-6

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands. 3 In fact, this is love for God: to keep His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

6 This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

Athletes train so hard off the field and so closely with their coach, that when competing in the actual contest, they have what some people call, a "coaching voice" in their heads.

--Guy hears a voice in his head. It says, "Sell all your stuff and go to Las Vegas."

-So he does. He sells his car, his house, his boat ... everything.

-He takes his money and buys a plane ticket. Goes to Vegas. He gets off the plane and the voice in his head says, "Go to Caesars Palace and go to the roulette table."

So he does. -He goes to Caesars Palace and gets to the roulette table.

--The voice says, "Put all your money on Black Nine."

And he does. The wheel spins, and the ball stops on Red 10.

The voice in his head says, "Oops." That's right. Oops. If I lose all my money at the roulette table in Las Vegas, there better be a better explanation than Oops.

There are many reasons -- some disturbing and unfortunate -- when people hear voices in their heads, and when people listen and act on those voices, the outcome can be a mess. But how about what Julie Bell calls a *coaching voice* in her head? That's a different story. [NOTE 1]

Bell is a sports psychologist who claims she can help you hear your inner coach. "That coaching voice in your head sets you up to do your best," she says. Bell is the founder of the Mind of a Champion, a Dallas-based coaching firm. She has found that some people have a strong coaching voice that sets them up well, while others need help. Bell's clients range from church teams to State Farm, and from a pro fisherman to the vice presidents of several Fortune 500 companies

Is this talk of an inner coach based on pop psychology? No, Scripture. "You have to be intentional with your thinking," insists Bell. "Paul talks about taking every thought captive to Christ. If we let our minds wander to whatever we want, we are in the world

and suffering the consequences of sin."

Here's the key, according to Bell: "In order to put my best out there, I have to make my thoughts obedient to Christ, to 'maximize' every occasion for Christ." Obedience to Christ. That's the coaching voice.

I am learning and growing a lot. One of the people I hang out with simply asks, "What is God telling you? Listen and be obedient!" It's Mother's Day and those of you who had Mom's that were good cooks or bakers, they taught you how to cook. Even if they just allowed you in the kitchen to watch. When I make pancakes I hear my Mom's voice telling me how to know when they are ready to flip. When I drive my car in the Winter on bad roads I hear my Dad's voice, "hands at nine and three, relax your hands, even if you have to open them on the steering wheel. If you have a front wheel drive and you are fish tailing try stepping on the gas, don't slam on the breaks or make quick jerky movements." When I played football, I played defensive back in college and I would see a running back coming to my side and my position coach's voice is in my head, lower your center of gravity, head up, tackle through the runner, wrap up, take him down.

On Mother's Day, we remember the things our mamas taught us. They were not only the voices in our heads, but around the kitchen table, the living room, just about everywhere. Here is one guys humorous rendition of what his mama taught him.

- My mama taught me to appreciate a job well done: "If you're going to kill each other, do it outside; I just finished cleaning."
- My mama taught me religion: "You better pray that will come out of the carpet."
- My mama taught me time travel: "If you don't straighten up, I'm going to knock you into the middle of next week."
- My mama taught me logic: "Because I said so, that's why."
- My mama taught me irony: "Keep laughing and I'll give you something to cry about."
- My mama taught me osmosis: "Shut your mouth and eat your supper!"
- My mama taught me contortionism: "Will you look at the dirt on the back of your neck!"
- My mama taught me stamina: "You'll sit there 'til all that spinach is finished."
- My mama taught me about weather: "It looks as if a tornado swept through your room."
- My mama taught me about the circle of life: "I brought you into this world and I can take you out."
- My mama taught me about behavior modification: "Stop acting like your father!"
- My mama taught me about genetics: "You're just like your father."
- My mama taught me about envy: "There are millions of less fortunate children in this world who don't have wonderful parents like you do."
- My mama taught me about anticipation: "Just wait until you get home."
- My mama taught me wisdom: "When you get to be my age, you'll understand."

**[NOTE 2]**

The goal, the main point of the sermon today, is that we need to spend enough time with God, with His Word, in prayer, and in relationship with Jesus Christ and in discipling that it's God's voice that we hear, more than parents, friends, etc. I spent enough time with my daughter and her family that when I forget to use manners I hear her voice reminding me to say, "please and thank you." But have I spent enough time with God that I hear His voice when I am doing life? When I have an opportunity to share the gospel, God's love, or to teach or begin a discipling relationship??

One of the greatest coaches of the first-century church was the apostle John, the author of three New Testament letters. In his first epistle, he says to his fellow Christians, "the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments" (1 John 5:3). John knows that if we let our minds wander, we will naturally fixate on the attractions and temptations of a culture that clamors for our attention and affection. But if we are intentional with our thinking, focused on the love of God and the commandments of God, then we'll be set up to do our best as followers of Christ. **[NOTE 3]**

Coach John begins with *love*. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God," he states, "and everyone who loves the parent loves the child" (v. 1). John sees every one of us as a member of God's large and loving family, and teaches that we become part of this family when we believe "that Jesus is the Christ." At the heart of this family is a set of committed and caring relationships, with love being felt between God and Jesus, between Jesus and God's other children, and between God's other children and God. This love flows freely within the family of God, and John makes the point that "everyone who loves the parent loves the child."

**[NOTE 4]** But this *love is no mere warm and wonderful feeling* -- it's an attitude that requires us to be intentional with our thinking and our acting. "By this we know that we love the children of God," says Coach John, "when we love God and obey his commandments" (v. 2). The visible proof of our love for the children of God is that we not simply love God, but that we *obey his commandments*. Love-talk is empty without love-action -- action that includes determined commandment-keeping. **We continue with love-action: obedience**

John's second coaching point is *obey*. Athletes understand this, whether they are pros or weekend warriors -- to put in a good performance, you have to obey your coach. In the year 2000, a Catholic priest challenged *Homiletics* contributor Henry Brinton to run the Marine Corps Marathon. Henry thought he was crazy, since he had no experience as a runner, and the prospect of 26.2 miles was daunting. But Henry needed a midlife challenge. His priest friend had run several marathons, so he coached him to run and walk, run and walk, run and walk ... one hour at a time ... three times a week.

The first time Henry hit the road, he ran for three minutes and had to stop, gasping for breath. But after walking for seven minutes, he was able to run for another three, and then he walked another seven and ran three. Over several weeks, his running increased and his walking decreased until he could run for an hour. And then he ran two hours. "If you can run two hours, you can run four hours," the priest-coach said. "If you can run

four hours, you can do a marathon."

The coach was right. Six months after beginning his training, Henry finished the Marine Corps Marathon in a respectable four hours, 12 minutes. Because Henry obeyed his coach's commandments, he fell in love with running, and seven years later found a way to use his running to show love for the children of God. In 2007, he became part of a team of 50 marathoners raising money for 25:40, an organization helping to fight AIDS in South Africa.

Suddenly, Henry's running took on much deeper significance. As he hit the road for long training runs, he thought of Lithemba, a 5-year-old South African boy with AIDS. Henry was raising money to support the clinic that treats Lithemba and pays the salary of AIDS monitors -- native South Africans trained in HIV/AIDS care and prevention. When Henry felt exhausted at the halfway mark, he thought of the weariness brought on by a life-threatening disease. When he struggled to make it to his next water stop, he wondered what it would be like to face real thirst: In rural South Africa, five million people lack clean drinking water. **Listening to the "Coach's" voice makes possible the impossible [NOTE 5]**

None of this would have been possible without listening to the coaching voice: run and walk, run and walk, run and walk. No love for Lithemba could have been shown without obeying the commandment to hit the road, one hour at a time, three times a week.

Love-talk is empty without love-action. What's true in long-distance running is equally true in the practice of the Christian faith. "For the love of God is this," says Coach John, "that we obey his commandments" (v. 3). So what happens when we hit the road as Christians, determined to live a life of obedience? Do we "mount up with wings like eagles" and "run and not be weary" (Isaiah 40:31), getting stronger and faster with every step we take? Not at all. We're going to stumble and fall, wander from the path, crash into other people, injure ourselves and flop to the ground in exhaustion. A life of obedience is a life of struggle, one that can exhaust us, discourage us, and sideline us with spiritual shin splints and other debilitating conditions.

But here's the promise of Coach John, if not Coach Jesus himself: If we keep getting up and moving forward: *Victory*. God's commandments may be difficult, but they're not meant to be onerous. Instead, they're designed to help us do our best and succeed as children of God, "for whatever is born of God conquers the world" (v. 4). John tells us that we have been set up for success by the God who loves us: He gives us a Son to believe in, a family of fellow children of God to love and a set of commandments to follow. **[NOTE 6]**

All of these gifts enable us to persevere when life starts to drag us down -- they're part of "the victory that conquers the world, our faith" (v. 4). If we base our lives on the belief that Jesus is the Son of a truly loving God, then we're going to be victorious in the face of any challenges. This doesn't mean that we won't experience failures, tragedies, disappointments and disasters, but it does mean, in the words of the apostle Paul, that

"we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). No matter what the world throws at us, nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39). We may stumble across the finish line, bruised and bloodied. But with the help of God, we'll be victorious. **Coach Jesus suffered -- for us** [NOTE 7] John concludes his coaching by pointing to the example of Jesus himself. Jesus is "the one who came by water and blood," he observes, "not with the water only but with the water and the blood" (v. 6). A mysterious verse, for sure, one that can leave you wondering. But John seems to be reminding us that Jesus *suffered* in this life -- he experienced not only the water of baptism, but also the blood of crucifixion. His victory involved pain and agony, and ours will as well.

In the face of life's challenges, both Coach John and psychologist Julie Bell tell us to make our thoughts obedient to Christ. This means focusing on the love of God, obeying his commandments and expecting to be victorious over the world. Remember, "whatever is born of God conquers the world" (v. 4). That's the coaching voice, the voice in your head. Listen to it. If what you are hearing lines up with Scripture and our Mission and Vision as a church ... Listen and obey! Let's pray ... AMEN

**Sermon Notes for "The Coaching Voice" based on 1 John 5: 1-6**  
**Given at Doster Community Church on Mother's Day May 14, 2023**

- I. What voices do you hear in your head? How do we take captive every thought to bring it into obedience to Christ?
  - II. We need to spend enough time with God in prayer, reading His Word, and growing our relationships with other Jesus-followers so that the "Coaching Voice" we hear in our heads is God's voice.
  - III. John was one of the greatest coaches. He must intentionally focus on the love of God and the three main commandments and spending time in the gospels.
  - IV. The visible proof of our love for the children of God is that we not only love God but obey his commandments. Love-talk is empty without love-action.
  - V. Listening to the Coach's voice makes possible the impossible. We must obey. We need to listen to God's Voice and do what He says.
  - VI. If we base our lives on the belief that Jesus is the Son of a truly loving God, then we're going to be victorious in the face of any challenges that life may throw at us.
  - VII. So what are you going to do about it? Please write down an "I will \_\_\_\_\_ statement. Write down something you can do this week to start developing God's "coaching voice" in your life.
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