



Coaching

How to invest in the right people—for maximum impact

The world of athletics understands how Jesus approached ministry, yet, by and large, the church does not have a clue. Why? Because we often fail to follow Christ's example regarding one of the most vital tasks of any leader: coaching.

Take, for example, Tony Dungy, coach of the Super Bowl champion Indianapolis Colts. Coach Dungy does just that—he coaches. In every team sport, coaches divide their teams according to the number of assistant coaches they have. Each assistant takes responsibility for a small group of players at certain skill positions. He or she has only one responsibility:

to give that group the *time* and *focused attention* needed to maximize their ability, execute as a team and win the game.

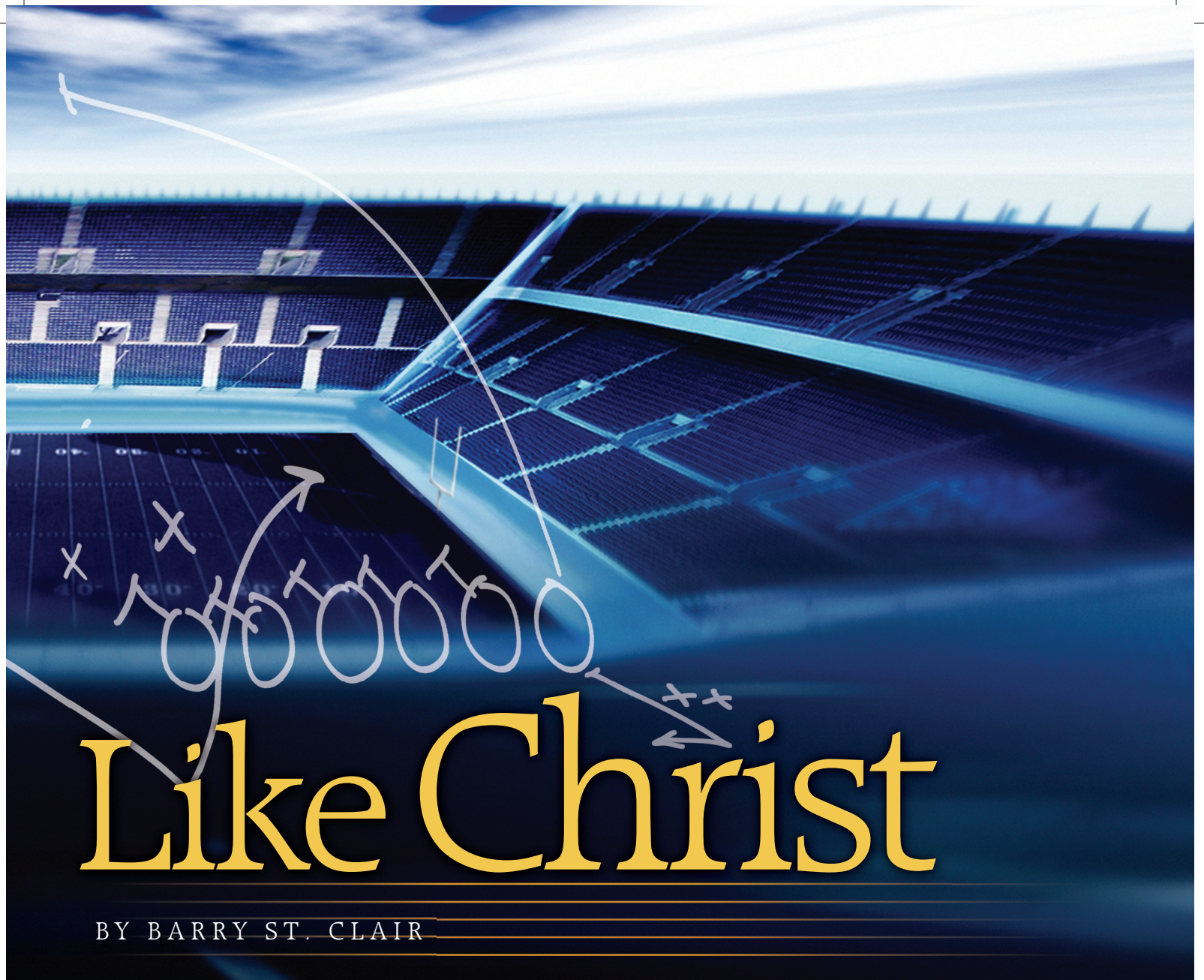
It's the same with the Colts. Dungy wouldn't be as effective if he tried to coach all 120 players on his roster. Instead, he (like most head coaches) *coaches his coaches*. He invests his *time* in each of his 16 assistant coaches and gives them *focused attention*. His coaches then do the same with the approximately seven players they're each assigned from July through January.

The structure has proven successful. *Sports Illustrated* even called Dungy's approach to coaching his coaches "a crafty way of impacting people's lives and putting them on a road to success."

In fact, over the years he has done so well investing in his coaches that four of them now lead other NFL teams: Herm Edwards (Chiefs), Lovie Smith (Bears), Rod Marinelli (Lions) and Mike Tomlin (Steelers). These are only a few of the names in Dungy's impressive "coaching tree"—assistant NFL coaches and college coaches who have coached under him. As one columnist wrote, Dungy's legacy is about people: "The coaching tree has roots all its own. The branches will spread and continue to grow and produce."

Following Divine Strategy

Jesus used this same tree analogy in John 15:5. He also lived out the concept.



Like Christ

BY BARRY ST. CLAIR

As church leaders and ministers, most of us have seen and heard this word picture for most of our lives. Still, it seems we're not getting the concept.

Jesus had 12 disciples. He coached (discipled) them. He could have taken a different approach by simply meeting the needs of hundreds of thousands of people. After all, everyone needed His life-changing touch. But Jesus understood the importance of leaving a legacy, of having lasting results. Because of this, He personally invested in His disciples by giving them *time* and *focused attention*. His one and only winning strategy for passing on His life to the next generation was to spend three years discipling His disciples. And in the end He sent

them out to do as He had done, to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19).

Are we doing this? Jesus didn't say to make converts of all nations. He didn't say, "Make sure you preach to people of all nationalities." He specifically commanded us to make *disciples*. Tragically, in my 30-plus years of experience in working with thousands of churches, I've seen virtually none of them coaching like Jesus coached.

This luminous lack of discipling has created devastating results in the body of Christ. Marriages within the church break up as often as those outside the church. Churchgoing teens have sex as often as non-churchgoing ones. Internet pornography among the clergy runs

rampant. A lack of coaching—personally investing *time* and *focused attention* in a small group of people—has left marriages without models, parents without the tools to spiritually invest in their kids, pastors isolated from their staff, and leaders and churches divorced from life-on-life investments in God's people.

Coaching With a Game Plan

It doesn't have to be this way. If you aspire to be a courageous leader who will rebuild the dilapidated church model of discipling, then I offer this simple "game plan" to radically restructure your own life and mirror Jesus' way of coaching.

1. Stop now to ask why. Set aside an hour or two to evaluate in writing how

you spend your time. Honestly ask: *Why I do what I do? Why do I struggle to invest in discipling a small group of people?*

Churches are busy places—often too busy. But what if your church stopped to ask these “why” questions? Would it fall apart if for a month the preaching and programs stopped and the leaders called the church to pray and fast to ask these questions?

2. Re-examine Jesus’ ministry model. During the prayer and fasting month—both personally and as a church—refocus on Jesus by reading the Gospels and asking, *How can I/we coach people like Jesus coached?* As you read, notice:

- How Jesus carved out time for intimacy with His Father (see Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42).
- How Jesus prayed specifically for His disciples (see John 17:6-19).
- How Jesus recruited His disciples and gave them His vision for leadership (see Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-10).
- How Jesus invested in His disciples personally—heart-to-heart (see John 6).
- How Jesus related to nonbelievers (see Mark 2:13-17).
- How Jesus created opportunities for His disciples to minister to others like He did (see Luke 9:1-6).

Once we look at Jesus’ life through the refocused lens of coaching, we catch sight of it on every page of the Gospels. Jesus wants us to do what He did, but we possess limited time. Instead of discipling people, we’re often caught running in the rat’s maze of church programs. We have to *decide* if we will spend our time doing what Jesus did. But before we decide, we must ...

3. Break through the confidence barrier. At some point all of us wonder if we have what it takes. If you’ve never been discipled, it’s easy to question what right you have in discipling others. Jesus addressed this fear with an awesome promise to His disciples: “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12). That promise is for you. Possess it as your own. When you stake your foundation purely in Christ’s authority rather than your own, you *can* coach others!

4. Find your team. Jesus pursued life-on-life mentoring with His disciples. It made all the difference in His ministry. Paul took a similar approach and it, too, led to greater effectiveness (think of Timothy, Silas, Erastus, Trophimus ... the list goes on). It makes sense that if Jesus and Paul pursued mentoring and it made all the difference for them, then certainly it will make all the difference for us as well.

With this in mind, who does God want you to disciple? Meet with these people one-on-one. Challenge each one to become part of your coaching team.



5. Coach your players. Thomas Mer-ton once said, “It is relationships that save everything.” When we coach we build relationships similar to the ones Jesus had with His disciples. Author Bobb Biehl explains the importance of this in his book *Mentoring*: “Mentoring is the emotional glue and is the relational glue that can hold our generation to the last and to the next. Mentoring is the relational bridge connecting, strengthening and stabilizing future generations of Christians.”

Until a few decades ago these coaching-based relationships were a way of life as one generation helped another develop and mature. A craftsman learned a skill and the way of life that surrounded it. A student learned in the home of a scholar. An older knight imparted warrior skills to a young soldier. Even in the church this apprenticeship structure was universal.

We must restore these relationships

today—particularly in the church. As Biehl states, “Our pews are filled with relationally disconnected people.” The remedy to this is simply developing true relationship. Coaching is one of the easiest, purest ways to do this. (For more information on the “how tos” of coaching, go to reach-out.org.)

6. Visualize your coaching tree. When we disciple our lives influence more people over time than we can imagine. Picture yourself as fruit on the coaching tree of Jesus or Paul 20 centuries later. It’s hard to even conceive of the size of that coaching tree! Now visualize what the Holy Spirit wants to do through you when you decide to refocus on doing ministry Jesus’ way.

- You disciple six people long-term.
- One year later these six disciple six others.
- After two years 36 people are being discipled.
- After three years 216 people.
- After four years 1,296 people.
- After five years your mentoring has multiplied to 7,776 people!

For more than 30 years I have followed Jesus’ coaching game plan with youth leaders, parents and teenagers, including my children. There’s hardly enough room to print all the wonderful stories that accompany every branch that’s been added to my coaching tree. I’ve “impacted” countless ministries around the world not because of my persuasive words, but simply because of a desire to build relationship with one person—who then went on to impact countless other people, who then impacted countless others.

It’s the same game plan Jesus had, the same one Paul had, and the same Tony Dungy and countless sports coaches have applied in recent years. Given their track record, it’s time we in the church start following it. ■

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