

## An Introduction to Life Coaching

Cover article from *CAPS Report*, newsletter of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, Vol. 31, Issue 3, Fall 2002. Written by Horace Lukens, PhD and Christopher McCluskey, LCSW

Ralph is a forty-six year old Christian with three kids, a great job, a solid marriage, and a secure retirement. He's been actively involved in his church, community, and his kids' sports teams and activities. Yet Ralph is exhausted, unfocused, and feels he's just "going through the motions". While he's not clinically depressed, he lacks enthusiasm and has no clear sense of what he wants out of life. Does Ralph need a therapist or some medication? Not likely, but he could clearly benefit from working with a life coach.

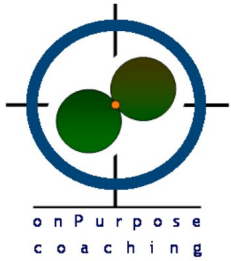
### What is Life Coaching?

Life coaching, a cutting edge and rapidly growing field, is a partnership between a client and a coach that is focused on the client taking action toward the realization of his/her visions, goals or desires. Life coaches assist clients in defining and clarifying their goals and vision in all areas of life and then designing strategies to achieve those goals. Life coaches often focus on five primary goals with their clients:

- ~ clarifying vision
- ~ identifying values that support that vision
- ~ identifying the resources that can be activated to pursue that vision
- ~ breaking the vision down into manageable goals, and
- ~ holding the vision for the client while encouraging them toward it.

Persons seeking a life coach typically come with one or more issues to address, such as:

- ~ enhancing and strengthening relationships
- ~ clarifying their vision and passion
- ~ finding balance and simplicity
- ~ deepening their spiritual walk with God
- ~ improving time management



- ~ navigating life transitions
- ~ getting unstuck in some area of struggle, or simply
- ~ closing the gap between where they are and where they want to be.

As Paul noted, we so often do the things we don't want to do and fall short in doing the things that we want to do (Rom 7:15). In other words, we all have gaps that, as part of our walk with Christ, can be closed with the help of a coach.

### **Counseling and Coaching**

As therapists and counselors, we are exceptionally well positioned to become life coaches because of our training in active listening, interpersonal dynamics, and understanding of human behavior. While there is a strong overlap in these skills between the two professions, there are some critical differences. Counseling typically focuses on the past and is reparative in nature; coaching focuses on the future and is growth oriented. Counseling is motivated by pain reduction, while coaching is motivated by passion. Coaching does not require making a diagnosis or working with managed care, but works with self-paying healthy individuals who are motivated to take responsibility for themselves. Progress in therapy relies on the skills and expertise of the professional therapist. Movement in coaching is driven by the client's motivation and desire to enhance their life.

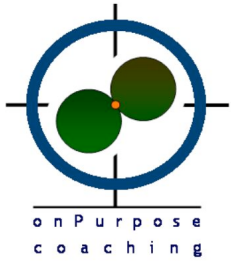
### **Christian Life Coaching**

As in counseling, there are many approaches to coaching, some of which are very much at odds with our Christian beliefs. Coaching may be heavily based on secular humanism and, when addressing spiritual matters, it typically does so from a decidedly New Age perspective.

It is possible, and we believe essential, for coaching to occur within a Christian worldview. In his recent book *Christian Coaching*, Dr. Gary Collins notes that Christian life coaching should have the overarching goal of helping clients move from where they are to where *God* wants them to be. As Christians we are called to be good stewards of the gifts and talents God has given us. Our lives are to be lived to His glory. Christian life coaching moves us more fully toward that goal.

### **Distinctives of Life Coaching**

Life coaching is innovative, forward moving, and takes full advantage of today's technology. Many coaches work exclusively by telephone, email and fax machine. Coaching is typically prepaid by credit card, with clients contracting monthly for sessions and retainer services. It offers a flexible schedule, low overhead, and has no geographical constraints. It also has greatly decreased liability risks and is not as physically, emotionally, or spiritually draining as psychotherapy.



## Training and Credentialing

There are more than fifty coach training programs in existence today but only two of these are distinctively Christian. The Christian Track at the Institute for Life Coach Training specializes in training therapists and counselors ([www.lifecoachtraining.com](http://www.lifecoachtraining.com)). Introductory level training typically involves teleclass instruction, assigned readings, and homework. Trainees are also encouraged to obtain their own coach to gain the experience of being coached.

There is currently no licensure required to become a life coach although, as the field grows, this may change. There are professional organizations and certifying agencies such as the Christian Coaches Network ([www.christiancoaches.com](http://www.christiancoaches.com)) and the International Coach Federation ([www.coachfederation.org](http://www.coachfederation.org)).

## Here to Stay

Like Ralph at the beginning of this article, there are many Christians who are looking for help in clarifying purpose and fulfilling God's call on their lives. They don't need a therapist; they want what life coaching has to offer. Initially dismissed by some as a passing fad, this field is now seeing explosive growth as people become more familiar with it. Practicing therapists and counselors are perhaps the best-prepared persons to enter this new profession. The reader is encouraged to research the field and consider adding coaching to your repertoire of services.

### **Reference:**

Collins, G. R. *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential Into Reality*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001.

### **About the Authors:**

Dr. Horace Lukens, currently President of CAPS Int'l., has recently added life coaching to his clinical practice in order to achieve freedom from managed care and greater professional flexibility. See [www.lifewalking.com](http://www.lifewalking.com).

Christopher McCluskey is President of Coaching for Christian Living and coaches fulltime from his home in the country. See [www.christian-living.com](http://www.christian-living.com).