



# Personal Coaching Phrases

## Lesson Series

### Introduction

Put on some polyester shorts, find a clipboard, grab a whistle, and let's talk coaching. Thinking back over the course of your life, you've probably had both good and bad coaches. The weaknesses of a bad coach tend to stand out, so take a moment to think about your favorite coach. What made that person an effective coach?

There are many important traits that good coaches possess, **but their primary focus ought to be to pursue *progress*, not *perfection*, by building on strengths.** Does that surprise you at all?

Here's why that's true: The key to sustained transformative growth is to persistently focus on the right things. We can do this by first learning to coach ourselves and then we will be able to effectively coach others.

Before we proceed, let's clear up a misconception. The concept of coaching ourselves is not self-help, it is not about silly, self-affirming clichés, and it is not a new idea. It is just a reality grounded in Biblical truth.

Contrary to popular belief, the healthiest people in the world are those who talk to themselves, not those who listen to themselves. The truth is that everyone engages in some form of inner dialogue. So, in this sense, you are coaching yourself every day whether you realize it or not. We are our own personal coaches. The only question is, "Are you a good coach or a bad one?"

A good coach tells you the truth in a helpful way. A Christian friend might encourage you to "Preach the gospel to yourself," or "Remind yourself of the promises of God." What is that friend doing? In effect, she is encouraging you to speak to your own soul; to coach yourself with truth from God's Word as you're led by the Holy Spirit. For the Christian, coaching yourself is essentially internal discipleship that is God-focused, Word-saturated, and Spirit-directed.

In Psalm 42:5-6, the Psalmist asks, "Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" This is a great example of the type of internal dialogue we all engage in. But, what the Psalmist says next is crucial. If he was a bad coach, he might say, "Knock it off!" "Quit complaining!" or even, "You're just feeling sorry for yourself." Do any of these phrases sound familiar? What's the problem with them? The problem is that no constructive, Biblical replacement is being offered as a solution. These examples amount to nothing more than a condemning critique. We don't change when someone merely points out a problem or focuses on a weakness.



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Thankfully, what the Psalmist says next is great coaching: “Hope in God.” This concise, three-word phrase changes *everything*. What did the author mean by “Hope in God?” He tells us! “I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.” The author redirects (coaches) his downcast soul onto the God of his salvation at the precise moment he needs it most. For the Psalmist, a world of meaning was packed into three simple words, causing his downcast soul to erupt in praise!

Most people who first try to develop a coaching phrase come up with a wordy strategy describing what they hope to do, but effective coaching phrases need to be more concise. The best coaching is customized truth, digestible in the moment, for your real-time situation. In these lessons, our goal is to help you make progress in this process of internal discipleship.



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### LESSON 1

**Biblical focus:** Psalm 42:5-6. See also: 1 Tim 4:15-16, Proverbs 4:23

**Coaching focus:** What do we mean by the term, “coaching ourselves?”

**Prayer focus:** Lord, help me positively exhort my own soul toward what is good

**Biblical insight:** Every person engages in some kind of internal dialogue. The Psalms reveal great examples of this. In Psalm 42, the author says, “Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.”

**Coaching key:** One of our board members was a professional coach who spent many years working with world-class athletes. One day during practice, one of the premiere athletes was thinking negatively about herself. Our board member asked, “What would you do if I coached you using the words you say to yourself while playing?” She bluntly replied, “I’d fire you!” He then asked her, “Who’s your only full-time coach?” She paused, beginning to understand the irony, and then said, “I guess, I am.” To which he replied, “It might be time to find a new one!”

If a champion athlete can coach herself negatively in something as comparatively simple as sports, imagine how poorly we are capable of coaching ourselves when difficult circumstances arise, especially when relational conflict surfaces or when we feel situational pressure.

Since every person engages in some type of internal dialogue, as believers, we need to turn this natural tendency into an opportunity to glorify God. So, what do we mean by “coaching ourselves?”

Coaching ourselves is the way we guard our hearts against evil and exhort our souls toward righteousness. It is a form of internal discipleship. The best coaching offers customized truth, digestible in the moment, for your real-time situation.

What’s a phrase you commonly say to yourself? Is it helpful, Biblically accurate, and specific? Like the athlete mentioned above, recognizing what we are habitually saying to ourselves is the insight that can lead to lasting change. If your most common phrase is not how you would want someone to speak to you, pray that the Lord would provide you with a better, God-honoring phrase. Replace the old phrase with the new one and start using it immediately.

As we will see throughout this week’s lessons, the best way to coach ourselves well in key moments is to develop and utilize effective personal coaching phrases.

**Brief prayer:** Holy Spirit, open my eyes and help me see the opportunities I have to grow spiritually through prayer as I continue to pray for myself and others each day.



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### LESSON 2

**Biblical focus:** Ephesians 4:29. See also: 1 Tim 4:16, Proverbs 4:23, 2 Peter 1:12

**Coaching focus:** The importance of developing personal coaching phrases

**Prayer focus:** Lord, help me to speak words consistent with Your Word

**Biblical insight:** Words are powerful. They can either build up or destroy. This is one of the reasons God's Word addresses the use of our words so clearly. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

**Coaching key:** If you go to a little league baseball game, what's the first thing you usually notice about the coach? Especially if you know one of the kids on the team, the first thing you notice is the way the coach speaks to the players. The reason is simple. The coach's effectiveness is largely dependent on what, and how well, the coach communicates with others.

Since every person engages in some type of internal dialogue, as believers, we need to turn this natural tendency into an opportunity to glorify God. Yesterday, we learned that whether we realize it or not, we are our own personal coaches. Why? Because, either internally or externally, positively or negatively, we are all continually communicating to ourselves.

Since this is true, it's worth considering the most effective and most God-glorifying way we can engage our own souls in dialogue. Almost all of us have a propensity to either think of ourselves more highly than we ought or in a more negative light than is actually true. The best way to talk to ourselves is to develop personal coaching phrases we can use to coach ourselves well, even when under pressure.

When do you tend to feel pressure or frustration? Think of a few examples. Recognizing when we feel tension in our lives provides a key insight that can lead to real change. Moments of stress are often the times when our internal dialogue becomes negative. In these moments, positive coaching phrases effectively help us to think and act in ways that are pleasing to God.

Effective coaching is customized truth, digestible in the moment, for your real-time situation.

As Christians, all of our coaching phrases should be good for building up, fitting to the occasion, and purposefully cause us to grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 4:29). The rest of this week, we will talk about why this approach works and how we can accomplish it.

**Brief prayer:** Holy Spirit, help me to speak words that are helpful to myself and others, that are appropriate for the situation, and that glorify You. Lord, may it be so.





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### LESSON 3

**Biblical focus:** Ephesians 4:21-24. See also: Romans 12:2, 2 Cor. 10:5, Col 3:5-17

**Coaching focus:** Change happens through replacement

**Prayer focus:** Lord, give me the best words to replace error with truth in my own life

**Biblical insight:** The progression of thought reflected in Ephesians 4:21-24 is a powerful exhortation to put off what is sinful, be renewed in our thinking, and put on what is righteous and good. This is what we mean when we say that change happens through replacement.

**Coaching key:** Think for a moment how much we are battered on social media with messaging that is unclear, unhelpful, or just untrue. Add to that things that you say to yourself in times of struggle, frustration, or sin. Yikes! We need an intentional approach to replacing unhelpful ways of thinking with God-focused truth. Begin by capturing the very first negative thoughts you have and make them obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5). How? Paul uses the phrases “put off” and “put on” to describe capturing these negative thoughts and replacing them. He calls us to put our old, sinful ways of acting behind us and replace them with new, holy habits (Col. 3:5-17).

The reason replacing our negative thoughts, speech, and actions is necessary is because change doesn't come by simply *telling* ourselves not to think, not to say, or not to do something wrong. Imagine if you were told not to think about a pink elephant. More than likely, you will keep thinking about that pink elephant until a new thought replaces it. We can't simply tell ourselves not to do or think something. We must actually replace an old thought with a new thought.

Coaching phrases give us the positive replacement language we need at decisive moments that will lead to God-glorifying action and personal transformation. These phrases allow us to exchange our sinful thoughts and negative speech with truth, leading to transformation by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). This is especially relevant for our internal dialogue since the battle is often in our minds. Think about a simple example with respect to your prayer life. Instead of coaching yourself by saying: “Don't forget to pray.” Use language like: “Meet with God at lunch today!” The first phrase is general and negative. The second phrase is more specific and accentuates the positive.

In other words, we are changed as we learn to replace our old ways of thinking by speaking in new ways that fit the occasion and give grace to those who hear, including ourselves.

**Brief prayer:** Holy Spirit, help me replace any general, negative, or sinful thoughts with truthful, biblical language that is encouraging and specific enough to lead to transformation. In Jesus' name. Amen.



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### LESSON 4

**Biblical focus:** Ephesians 4:29, Proverbs 12:25, 25:11

**Coaching focus:** Generalities are generally too general to be effective

**Prayer focus:** Lord, help me pray specifically for the things I desire to change

**Biblical insight:** There is a key phrase found in Proverbs chapters 12 and 25 that is reiterated in Ephesians 4:29. “As fits the occasion,” appears in all three texts and is crucial to the development of coaching phrases. Our words must fit the occasion, meaning they must be appropriate for the situation, in order to be effective.

**Coaching key:** When we think about unhelpful or untrue words, we probably first think of lies, and for good reason. Direct lies can be incredibly destructive. However, other forms of lying can be equally as ineffective and just as damaging. Think, for example, of flattery. In a veiled attempt to make people feel better, the world flatters and offers self-affirming speech, but it is nothing more than a lie. Flattery isn’t loving or helpful, because it isn’t true.

Now, think of a person who gives you a meaningful compliment or says something encouraging to you. Isn’t it true that the more specific the comment, the more powerful it is?

As we begin thinking about effective personal coaching phrases to use in our lives, it is generally the case that generalities are generally too general to be effective. For example, if you are struggling with feeling down, coaching yourself by recalling the word “happiness” won’t lift your spirits. Happiness is too broad to be powerful.

Similarly, and contrary to popular opinion, just saying a word out loud has no inherent power to accomplish anything. In order for a coaching phrase to “fit the occasion,” it must be specific enough to provide power when needed. For example, phrases like, “Listen well,” “Pray first,” or “Focus when under fire,” suggest a specific action and can help us in key moments, especially when we’re under pressure. We all feel pressure for different reasons, so think about when you feel pressure. Is it when you’re in conflict with your spouse or a friend? When you think others are assessing you? When you don’t have enough time to finish something important?

These are the moments when we need effective coaching phrases that can help us think what we need to think, say what we need to say, and do what we need to do, even when under pressure.

Tomorrow we will look at how to choose which phrases are most effective for you personally.

**Brief prayer:** Holy Spirit, help me to coach myself and others using words that are specific enough for the situation to carry meaning and power. May it be so. Amen.



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### LESSON 5

**Biblical focus:** Proverbs 16:20-21

**Coaching focus:** Select phrases that are personally meaningful to you

**Prayer focus:** Lord, give me discernment about words that will help me think clearly

**Biblical insight:** Proverbs 16:20-21 includes two great phrases: “Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good,” and “The wise of heart is called discerning.” Let’s take a few minutes to give thought to the types of phrases that might be especially meaningful to us personally.

**Coaching key:** Yesterday we looked at the fact that meaningful coaching phrases need to be specific enough to “fit the occasion” to maximize their power and lead to positive action. In order to be effective, these phrases also need to be personally meaningful. There are two key components to coming up with personal and meaningful coaching phrases: 1) We need to be discerning about the temptations and distractions that discourage us, and 2) We need to know what kinds of words tend to help us in the moment.

Now that we have a grasp on some of these initial concepts, let’s think about how they specifically apply to your prayer life. Let’s say you have completed the *20-20 Prayer Challenge* and you see positive fruit in your life as a result. You’ve been blessed with the way that you have communed with God through brief prayer each day. Your goal is to continue to pray regularly, but you know that all too often in life you tend to come up with excuses instead of following through. So, you are aware that brief prayers have helped but you are also aware of the temptation you face to stop praying.

Take a moment to think of a brief coaching phrase that would be both personally meaningful and would encourage you to continue praying. It should be something that truly resonates with you. For example, when you are tempted to skip praying, you could remind yourself to “Do the next right thing.” Or, you could say something as simple as, “Go to God.” Or simply, “Breathe!”

Think of a phrase that is specifically focused, succinctly worded, and can be strategically timed as a means of encouraging your ongoing growth in prayer. What might your phrase be? Write down an idea or two:

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**Brief prayer:** Lord, show me areas in my life where I need to replace my old thinking with a new way of processing. Help me to do the next right thing, Lord! In the name of Jesus. Amen



## LESSON 6

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**Biblical focus:** Proverbs 15:23, 17:27, 25:11, Ecclesiastes 3:7, Hebrews 10:24

**Coaching focus:** Concise coaching is the only coaching option in the moment

**Prayer focus:** Lord, help me to apply truthful, specific words in the moment

**Biblical insight:** Proverbs 15:23 extols the virtue of a word spoken at exactly the right moment. Ecclesiastes 3:7 says that there is a time to remain silent and a time to speak. Key coaching moments are a time to speak apt words at exactly the right time.

**Coaching key:** This week we are learning to create and utilize personal coaching phrases. Most people who try to develop a personal coaching phrase come up with a wordy strategy describing what they hope to do, but effective coaching phrases must be succinct. We have already covered the fact that these phrases need to fit the occasion, be specific, and should be personally engaging. Let's build on these truths by adding another important characteristic of effective coaching phrases: they need to be concise.

Several years ago, there was a funny golf commercial that aired during a tournament. As a golfer started his backswing, hundreds of his thoughts about his swing popped onto the screen for all to see. The point of the commercial was that it was impossible for the golfer to coach himself with clarity when a myriad of jumbled thoughts were crowding his mind. This is why self-coaching phrases must be concise. Just like a golf swing, we usually only have a second or two to coach ourselves effectively. Too much information is counter-productive.

Think through some of the coaching phrases that you have come up with over the past week. Is it possible to shorten the phrases you are planning to utilize? Simply take one phrase and see if it is something you would actually say to yourself. If not, the reason may be because the phrase is too long. Imagine a conductor of a symphony. During a performance, the conductor conveys changes in volume and tempo to the musicians simply by using quick hand signals. The reason? Under pressure, very little information can be processed quickly.

However, even concise phrases can pack a lot of punch. Think of the famous formula  $E = mc^2$ . That very brief formula conveys a ton of important information to physicists.

Let's practice: Turn this sentence into a concise and useful coaching phrase that would be personally meaningful to you: *God is fully trustworthy, completely loving, and always in control.*

How could you adjust this phrase to make it more concise? \_\_\_\_\_

**Brief prayer:** Lord, give me succinct coaching phrases that I can utilize in key moments of the day to remind me to pray brief prayers for others. In Jesus' name. Amen.





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### LESSON 7

**Biblical focus:** Proverbs 25:28, 2 Cor 13:5, 2 Peter 1:10

**Coaching focus:** Coaching phrases equip us to lead, not follow, our hearts

**Prayer focus:** Help me lead my heart with truth and trust that my feelings will follow

**Biblical insight:** Proverbs 25:28 says, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” This proverb implies that a man without borders around his heart, a man without the ability to govern his heart appropriately, is unable to protect his heart from his own evil desires and therefore becomes vulnerable to every outside temptation and danger.

**Coaching key:** A coaching phrase frequently touted on social media is: “Follow your heart.” Unfortunately, this does not qualify as sound Biblical counsel. Why is that? The reason is that our hearts, and our emotions in particular, are important gauges but terrible guides. The purpose of a gauge is to alert us when there is a problem (e.g. low fuel or engine temperature is too high). However, gauges are not capable of telling us *how* to fix a problem.

Similarly, we do far better when we lead ourselves with God’s truth rather than listen to what our hearts tell us about how we feel. Emotions are good gifts from God, but they aren’t designed to carry the mantle of leadership. Since we all engage in some form of inner dialogue, we must learn to coach ourselves to *lead* our hearts rather than *follow* our hearts. So, how does all of this relate to coaching ourselves to pray brief, regular prayers?

Praying brief prayers involves talking to God and asking Him to use His power to impact the lives of the people in this world. But, we face a tremendous spiritual temptation to avoid doing so. Many people struggle with the self-governance needed to continually turn to God not only to express our dependence on Him, or to ask Him to intervene for others, but because He is the fountain and source of all joy in our lives. Learning to coach ourselves effectively at the precise moment we are tempted to avoid turning to God in prayer can be a game-changer for our lives. What is an area of life you feel frustrated about because you have not been able to gain the traction you desire? Apply the truths we have talked about right now: 1) Realize the area of opportunity, 2) Recognize the temptation, 3) Replace the ineffective thoughts with new coaching phrases, and 4) Remind yourself to pray in every situation of daily life.

The coaching application opportunities in prayer and beyond prayer are endless for our lives!

**Brief prayer:** Lord, prompt me to coach myself with truth and be led by Your Spirit when I feel tempted to avoid praying. Help me to lead my heart to pray. May it be so. Amen.