A Coach’s-Eye-View of Life

A few years ago, a retired military officer who wanted to be coached on his career path approached me. After leaving the service Brett had turned down an offer to stay in a similar role as a civilian contractor, sold his beautiful home in Hawaii and returned to the states to start a second career as a lawyer. He was now in his final semester of law school prior to graduation.

Brett was having second thoughts about his choice of careers. The farther he went in school, the more he felt he was just going through the motions. A real go-getter who didn’t stop often to really reflect, Brett had managed to ignore his growing sense of uneasiness for some time. But with only two months of classes to go, he finally had to admit to himself that his heart was not in being a lawyer. He was also concerned about his marriage. The stress of relocating and not having an income had taken a toll, and he and his wife had begun seeing a counselor.

As he talked through what was going on inside, Brett finally stated, “You know, all the biggest mistakes in my life I’ve made in the last three years. I shouldn’t have left the Navy—I really enjoyed what I was doing there. I shouldn’t have turned down the chance to stay as a civilian, either. I got several offers when I retired, but I was so sure I wanted to go to law school that I didn’t even explore them. And I wish we hadn’t sold our house. I loved Honolulu more than anywhere we ever lived—the beautiful weather, the skies, the scent of the flowers wafting through our windows at night—but housing prices have gone up so much that we could never afford to go back. I’ve spent all this money and three years of my life training to be a lawyer, and now I wish I’d just stayed where I was. I feel like I’ve totally missed God’s will for my life.”

Who Are You Becoming?

How you respond to a situation like this illustrates what you believe about how God works with people. On the surface, it appeared that Brett had made some mistakes (he admitted he’d simply gone with what made rational sense to him instead of praying about it) and was reaping the consequences. We could have moved straight ahead into some career planning. But as Brett’s coach, I saw some larger dynamics at work.

“Brett,” I offered, “Can I give you another perspective on that?”

“Sure, go ahead,” he replied.

“You mentioned that you feel like you’ve missed God’s will for your life. Here’s what I see. For the first time in twenty-some years, you’re asking fundamental questions about your destiny. You’ve told me you want to learn how to pray so you can hear what God has for you instead of just following what seems logical. You mentioned that you and your wife had been struggling for years, but for the first time you’ve gotten help and you’re working with a counselor. And now you’ve hired me as a coach to help you really dig in and discover what you should be doing with the rest of your life. God seems to be much more a part of your thinking and your actions than he was three years ago. From where I sit, you are more in the center of God’s will for your life than you’ve ever been.”
What does it mean to be “in God’s will” for your life? Here’s one way readjust your perspective. Think back for a moment to when you were dating your spouse-to-be. When you were with the man of your dreams, was your attraction based on who he was, or on what he had done in the past? As a man, would you ask a woman to marry you because of her track record—because she always made the right choices—or because you saw her as the kind of person you wanted to marry?

The answer is obvious: you don’t marry a person’s past. You don’t keep a scorecard and rank your dates based on how many mistakes they made before you met: you fall in love with who someone is. You love their identity, their “being,” not their track record.

Our relationship with Jesus is the same way. He’s not marrying us because we’ve done everything right in the past—He’s coming back for a bride who is the right kind of person. This leads to a powerful insight on how God develops leaders:

God is more interested in who you are becoming than in what you are doing.

Take Brett’s situation. Brett made some mistakes in his decision-making, his marriage and in his priorities. If you look at his situation in terms of what he is doing, he is out of God’s will. In other words, if God’s will for Brett is to make certain decisions, be at the right place at the right time, and do the right thing, he’s missed it. However, if you look Brett’s destiny in terms of what he is becoming (like his coach did), a different picture emerges. Through this painful experience, Brett has begun to seek God in a new way, to invest in his relationship with his wife, to make changes to his character—he is becoming a whole new man. Which is the more important outcome?

When what a person is becoming is the priority, you see things in a new light. It would have been possible for Brett to make the “right” decision about his career without growing as a person or getting any closer to God. But something much more profound happened. In spite of making some wrong choices, he was transformed by his experiences, and became more like Christ—and that is a big part of God’s ultimate purpose for Brett’s life. Accomplishing our destiny is less a measure of being in the right spot at the right time than it is to draw near to God, to grow up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Excerpted from Leadership Coaching by Tony Stoltzfus