

I was a high school football star. (Well, my cousins were.)

Ok, but I played football in high school. (For one year before I quit.)

Yeah, but I had playing time in almost every game in the season. (Because we were so good, coach kept putting in the worst players to try to even out the score... and that was me.)

Ok, so I wasn't a high school football star. In fact, I hated football before the first game even began. And I blame it on the coaches. Not because the coaches were bad – on the contrary, we won the whole season handily. No, I blame the coaches for being coaches. And “coaching” is not the way to motivate me. Let me explain.

Everyone is motivated, guided, and taught differently. In football, coaching involves a lot of yelling, pushing, explaining, teasing, and forcing players to push themselves beyond what they would push themselves to do. My cousins were quarterbacks, my uncle was a coach, and I don't think I'm far off in this assessment. Many of my friends love to be pushed, to be yelled at, even mocked. This makes them better, helps them grow, and builds relationship between them and the coach. Coach Rose and Coach Ross (I think those were their names) yelled at me, told me how little I was working, and how much more I could do if I wasn't so weak, and for many people this motivated them to be better. But not for me. For me, this just made me feel useless and stole my hope of any kind of improvement. I don't hold any illusion that I could have been great, or even good. But I may have at least continued had I been more “coachable”.

As we look at the many faces of God, even I have to admit that one aspect of God's character is “Coach”. God is the ultimate motivator, even if it means being less than nice. Peter, Jesus' star quarterback, gets lazy in his discipleship. Jesus tells the team He's got to die for them to win, and Peter takes the easy way out. So how does Coach Jesus get Peter back to the gameplan when he's being lazy? “Get behind me, Satan! You're a stumbling block to me!” (Matt. 16:23) And Peter snaps back, and leads the team for years to come. And imagine if the Sermon on the Mount wasn't given as a nice, quiet professor but instead as a fired up, intense football coach! Go read it in that tone and it opens up whole new ways of seeing Jesus.

I'm not motivated by the Halftime speech, or screaming in my ear as I try with all I have to lift the spiritual weights I'm trying to carry. But many are, and Jesus knew how to motivate them. Tomorrow, I'll talk about how I AM motivated and how Jesus had this style as well. But for now, know that Jesus can push you to grow better than Any Reid, Mike Ditka, or Mike Holmgren. In fact, He's the greatest motivator that has ever existed.

Questions to ponder...

What motivates you? What style of teaching, training, or coaching helps you to grow and get better?

Where do you see that kind of motivation in the bible? What stories show God training that way?

Who is a person in your spiritual circle who might be good at motivating you like that? Could you seek their help in your spiritual growth?