Coaching the Coach

Ben Haugen and Erin Nelson are members of a men’s early morning Bible study affiliated with First Church in suburban St. Louis. The men in the group have been together for a considerable period of time and have committed themselves to the church’s stated goal of maintaining personal accountability. It was in this vein that Ben suggested he and Erin get together to discuss a pressing issue that perhaps should be taken up by the Bible study group.

There has been growing concern in the community about the behavior of the local high school football team, head coach Bill Jensen, who is also a member of the men’s group. That concern focuses on the harsh and often abusive language Bill uses with the team and the several instances in which he was not able to control his temper during games. Two parents of football players who attend another church in town approached Ben about Bill’s behavior, knowing that both men attend First Church.

At the professional level, Bill has lived a rewarding life. As long as he could remember, he wanted to coach football at the high school level. His college football career was similar to that of many successful coaches. After an impressive high school career, he was a scholarship player on a state university Division 1A team. While never a starter, his desire to someday coach led him to actively observe the behavior of that coaching staff. The head coach was a former NFL player who believed in a no-nonsense approach to dealing with student athletes. Bill has been at the high school for sixteen years and has been very successful in terms of winning. His winning percentage is 82 percent and his teams have been in the state playoffs two of the last five years. Beyond the performance measure, a basic tenant of Bill’s coaching philosophy is that student athletes maintain good standing, both in academic performance and as citizens of the community. Any violation of school policy is cause for immediate dismissal from the team.

Bill’s personal life, however, is complicated. He comes from a Christian home in which he had two brothers who also became high school coaches, but not in football. While neither of them regularly attends a church, the three brothers are close. Bill is married with three children, two of whom are grown. His wife, Julie, is the family’s main connection to First Church. She is active in both the church choir and in teaching children’s Sunday school class. Bill is also a member of the church and has been a part of the Bible study group for the last five years. He regularly attends Sunday worship services and the study group whenever possible. The primary conflict in Bill’s personal life occurs because his strong commitment to coaching has limited his significant friendships to other coaches, both in the local community and regionally in other conference schools. These coaching friends are well aware of Bill’s behavior. They do not all necessarily condone such behavior, but they tend to be more sympathetic and understanding, as coaches, rather than being critical.
This is the situation as Ben sees it: The issue is not limited to correcting Bill’s behavior to meet the objections of the athlete families. As a member of First Church, the behavior of this popular and winning coach reflects on the church and other Christians in the community. What is most difficult for Ben is how to propose the men’s group address the situation. While personal accountability has been something the group has talked about for a long time, a direct challenge such as this has never come up.

As Ben notes, “How should we balance our friendship with Bill and our responsibility as believers to correct this problem before it gets worse? I have no idea how Bill will react. Furthermore, I am very concerned about how this might affect Bill’s relationship with Julie.”

He and Erin agree to get together later this week to discuss how they could use scripture as the moral code within which to have the group approach Bill. To get ready for the meeting with Erin, Ben ponders what Scripture would be most appropriate.

To be effective in the short time they will have to speak with Bill, Ben knows that only relevant Scripture must be pointed that applies specifically to Bill’s situation.

**ASSIGNMENT**

Provide the Biblical support for Ben and Erin as they balance their friendship with Bill and the need to address Bill’s behavior.
My Scriptural Research:

Group Scriptural Research:

Decisions / Recommendations:

Primary Scriptural References: