



# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

*The podcast dedicated to Raising the Standard of Coaching...  
and Changing the World*

## Episode 012

### **Coaching Caregivers of Special-Needs Persons: Kaleen Marshall's Story**

CHRIS: Well, we have an episode today that I'm particularly excited about, looking forward to partly because it speaks into the lives of persons who are very near and dear to me. If you have looked at the topic for today, you know that we're going to be interviewing Kaleen Marshall. She is specifically going to be sharing about some of the challenges that she has faced as a sister of an adult who has special needs, in this case Down Syndrome, but it could be in any number of life limiting kinds of things and all of the impact that that has not just on the individual but then on the family, the care givers, the extended persons in that individual's life whose lives are often very dramatically impacted by special needs. If that is something that is near and dear to you, impacts your life directly or the life of someone you love, you I think are going to be especially ministered to through what's about to follow. Kim, let's introduce who we have here.

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Kaleen Marshall actually came to us, Kim and I, as a student at the institute, Professional Christian Coaching Institute, because she had been referred by her coach, the two of them having discerned that she needed to move into this direction as a professional coach. She has taken my course at the institute on launching a successful coaching practice. Also in Kim's class, one of many instructors that we have that teaches a course called The Essentials of Life Coaching. She's in both of our courses. She has had an amazingly rapid transition in to the field and she's going to share some of that, but Kim, share with us just a little bit more about what we know so far, you and I, about Kaleen.

KIM: Well, it's going to be a fun story for me to listen to as it unfolds. Kaleen and I have had the opportunity to connect a little around coaching skills and coaching competencies, but to hear that she already has 15 paying clients before she has even finished our class, we still have some time left, really astounds me and excites me, and I'm really eager to hear that part of the story as well as how God has used what seems like tragedy and suffering once again for His glory. Welcome, Kaleen. I'm glad you're here.

KALEEN: Thanks, Kim. I'm glad to be here.

CHRIS: Kaleen, tell us a little bit about you personally first. We know a little bit but let our listeners just kind of step into your background, your marriage, you've launched your kids. Tell us a little bit about the personal life, spiritual life, and background before we dive into your specific transition here.

KALEEN: My husband and I have been married for 27 years. We have two boys. My background, I have always worked in church work, have been involved in big churches around the country, and been on staff at the large none for profit as well.

CHRIS: Right. Let's see, you and Wally were on staff with Campus Crusade I think primarily through Athletes in Action for about 15 years. So you were there

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in California for eight or so, moved a couple of other times, and you have landed in the Chicago land area and with yet another large ministry for a season of years, right?

KALEEN: Right. When we were in Colorado, we had a phone call from Willow Creek Church asking if we would consider moving. There was a position open for myself and they didn't realize that Wally and I kind of came as a package. We have always done ministry together. The guy that called asked if I would consider an opportunity there and I was afraid to go to my husband because he was in his prime of his life. He was the director of Athletes in Action in Colorado at CU University, which was a pleasure and a privilege to be at that campus. I went to him and I said, "What would you think about moving?" He goes, "This is my dream. I'm not moving." What I didn't know at that time is that God was working on his life. He was looking at our relationship as a husband and wife, and he had been meeting with a guy, talking about allowing my wife to flourish, do I do that? When I went to him, he said, "Let me take a moment and think about this" not knowing what he had been working through, came back to me five minutes later and he said, "I had been working through what it would look like to allow you to flourish and use your gifts. I think you should pick up the phone and call and see what that opportunity looks like."

We actually moved to Willow for me and my position there. When we were interviewing, they interviewed him as well. Now get this, he got hired before me because I had way too many questions and I wasn't sure because when I originally through the interview process, they were looking at me for something else and that's what I was interested in. In the midst of it, they asked me because of my background, "Would you consider the Special Needs Ministry at Willow?" At that time, they only had part time staff and they were opening up to a full time staff member. I said, "Oh, I don't think so." I thought that I was done in that field, to be honest. I went out in the atrium and God gave me this vision over the lake at Willow. It was slots of

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wood going over the water of the lake and He just showed me through a metaphor pushing those slots of wood together that He wanted to use me to allow people not to fall through their cracks at Willow Creek. I went back to the director and I said, “I will take the position” and that’s how we got to Willow.

CHRIS: Wow. Oh man, the Lord doesn’t often speak so clearly as that. You’re saying you received a specific vision of something and you clearly knew the message that was intended through it.

KALEEN: Yeah it was very clear so I went back in and said, “I will take the position.” I didn’t know what the money was. I didn’t know anything about it. I just knew that I needed to take the position.

CHRIS: This is an act of obedience, wow. So now both of you are on staff at Willow Creek but fast forwarding to today, that’s not actually where the two of you are now, right?

KALEEN: No, no. To pick up the story, my dad passed away in 2005 and that’s when I resigned from my position at Willow. I needed to take some time off because I was very close to my dad. At that time though, my mom approached us right after my dad died and asked if Wally and I would take the boys and move them from Illinois to Arizona to help her with my sister, Carrie, who has Down syndrome. Our boys were moving into high school at that time and Wally looked right at my mom and said, “I’m sorry but we need to raise our boys in Illinois and we will help you but we are not going to move here.” So we said no and that started a long journey of not hearing from my mom for about five years.

KIM: Oh, how painful.

KALEEN: It was very painful but we felt like we did the right thing, but the disappointment in my mom was that her children didn’t come behind her to help with Carrie.

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KIM: So what happened at the end of the five years?

KALEEN: It was right after Thanksgiving. The phone rang and it was my mom. I picked up the phone and she said, “Hello. I want you to know that I’m sick.” Of course my heart dropped and I immediately thought what’s going to happen to Carrie because that’s something I’ve lived with all my life – what’s going to happen to Carrie- and that is every parent talks about, “What’s going to happen when we die?”

CHRIS: You bet.

KALEEN: So I asked her what was her diagnosis and she said she had stage I breast cancer and if we could come for Christmas. We already had plans for Christmas so we decided to go in January. When we arrived at my parent’s house, we walked in and the home looked like it was in a foreclosure. Nothing had been done. It was overgrown. So Wally and I, we’re people movement, “Get out the lawnmower, all of your dad’s equipment, the friend of the house.” I’ll get going. We looked in the refrigerator. There were moldy items in the refrigerator. He said, “I’ll take care of it. You take your mom to the doctor and find out what’s going on.”

I took her in, put her on the table for radiation, and she was so weak she couldn’t even take off her clothes herself. I knew something was bigger than stage I breast cancer and this had been going on for a while. My mom came out of the appointment, put her in a room, and that’s when I confronted her and asked her really what was going on. My mom had stage IV breast cancer and had 30-60 days to live from November 2<sup>nd</sup>, and we were already in the middle of January. I knew that she had surpassed her time. We flew back to Illinois, leave of absence, tried as fast as I could to learn as much about my sister in those days, not knowing when my mom would pass away. I placed her in hospice on February 8<sup>th</sup> and on the morning of February 10<sup>th</sup>, my mom passed away. During that timeframe – from February to April – we brought Carrie back to Illinois and our kids graduated from college. We tried to

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celebrate as much as possible. I quit my job, emptied out my office, and we drove Carrie back to Arizona and I lived there from the middle of April 2012 to the beginning of November 2012, taking care of my sister, helping to understand her, helping to understand the programs, and not wanting to take her away from all the structure that she knew. To me that was more devastating than me moving there.

CHRIS: This is kind of a teaser. I know where the rest of this conversation goes. We're going to kind of camp out here because the next about three years or so, just are fascinating pieces of this transition, but I want to be sure that we're hearing that the grounding, the thread that seems to run through this, you have walked with the Lord, served the Lord, you and Wally together as a family, raising your kids all those years trying your best to make discernment about how the Lord is calling you and to answer that call, live in the season whatever is needed, and this thing came for you from out of the blue. Left field, haven't heard from mom in years, and not only do you hear from her and things are amiss, but in almost no time, just a matter of weeks, mom is gone. You are in full custody of your sister. You did have to let go of that position and move out here. That kind of, "God, where are you in the midst of this?" This is the same woman who says, "I went out, I took the interview. I walked out to the lake and the Lord gave me a vision." Our mind would say, "Oh okay. So I'm supposed to take the job to become the program director for the special needs kids" and He's saying, "Well, yeah that and a whole lot more."

KALEEN: And that's what I believed, Chris. It felt way bigger than what I had ever anticipated and God is using Carrie's life to change my life.

CHRIS: So I guess take us into that place.

KALEEN: Let me tell you a little bit about my sister. At her birthday party, there were over 400 people. The influence that she has is amazing. She has medals through Special Olympics. Everywhere she goes, she touches somebody.

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There are newspaper articles. People have met her and written the newspaper about how she has influenced their lives. She's actually a walking miracle. My sister has Eisenmenger's Syndrome. She's never supposed to sit up, walk, talk, nothing, and my brother and I were the ones that taught her to sit. We'd put her in a cardboard box starting at 4 years old and we just sat her in the box and one day, we just kept taking one side down at a time until she had balance and that's how she learned to sit up. The social workers at that time would come and tell us what we couldn't do and we turned it around again to say, "This is what she can do." So we taught her to walk, talk. My mom taught her how to eat because she had a protruding tongue. There wasn't the medical field that there is now so there's a lot of tenacity in our family and determination to help her.

I lived in Arizona until November. I brought her back to Illinois. What I didn't know is Arizona is the #1 state in the country for funding for the disabled and Illinois is the last state in the funding for money. I didn't know to check on that, didn't know to even look that up. I thought everything transferred so immediately when I moved her here, we lost everything for her. So financially, now I don't have a job and now we don't have our funding. Wally has moved to part time.

CHRIS: Oh my.

KALEEN: And I'm turning 50. Wally decided to have the huge birthday party for me. He invited about 200 people over to our home. At that party, there was a guy there that came up to me and asked if I would be a part of a strategic planning thing. He was starting a business and would I be a part of strategic planning with his business. I said, "You know what, I'm so burned out." I'm just still trying to manage Carrie in our home. The transition has been very difficult. Managing her, our boys have just graduated from college. They were back in and they were trying to figure out what to do. I said, "I don't think I would be worth anything at the strategic planning time. Really,

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my days are up with strategic planning.” He said, “I really would like you there.” I thought about it and I decided to go, one, just to get a break from everything.

CHRIS: Kaleen, I think that’s important to underscore because the party you said was wonderful, but when we were talking about this earlier and you were recapping to Kim and I the number of things that had happened in such rapid sequence and how upside down things had turned from where you and Wally had thought they were heading not even a year before. Your words were, I felt, at 50 years of age, “My life is over.”

KALEEN: I did. I felt like my life was over at 50 years old. I read a lot of leadership books. They talk about in *The Making of a Leader* you’re going to hit this wonderful place that you’re going to soar. I go, “I guess I don’t get to do that. I’ll never reach that,” and I really felt like my life was over, that I would be sitting at home taking care of Carrie. Wally would be doing something else. I wouldn’t be in the church work anymore and that’s what God had for me. I was really angry. I’m sitting at this meeting. We had to go around and share who we were and how we knew the guy that was doing this, that invited us. I participated just not very much but I really wanted to learn and listen. The second day, there was a guy that was sitting across from me and at lunch, he reached across the table and he said, “Hey, tell me about your sister,” asking me a wonderful question and I said, “I don’t want to talk about my sister. Quite frankly, nobody ever asks about me so I really don’t even want to talk to you.”

KIM: And you said that out loud?

KALEEN: Yeah. He very wonderfully said, “Okay” and gave me permission to feel how I felt and I remember that because I felt so bad for what I had said. I went to the bathroom and started crying. I’m like, “I’m a mess.” I walked back into the meeting. I had to leave early that day and they said, “Kaleen is going to be leaving early.” The meeting went on for another hour and then I

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said, “I have to excuse myself.” This guy again across the table, he said, “I can walk you out.” He walks me out and he hands me a business card. I didn’t look at it and I actually threw it away. He said, “If you ever need anything, call me.” I was just like, “I don’t need anybody.” I can’t even describe it. I mean, I was in a hole.

A few weeks later my husband, Wally, went to a Barrington breakfast and heard a wonderful speaker. He came home and he said, “I think I have your professional executive coach that you’ve been talking about. You need a business coach and you need somebody to help you out of the hole.” I said, “I don’t think I’m ready yet.” He was like, “I’m going to email the company, Convene, and just respond back.” Well he emailed them on my computer said, “This is Kaleen Marshall.”

KIM: What happened to that submissive husband?

KALEEN: I know.

CHRIS: I love this guy.

KALEEN: When they emailed me back, I did not respond. A few days later, he goes, “Did you respond?” I said, “No, I’m not really ready, Wally.” He goes, “Kaleen, trust me. You’ll really like this guy. You’ll really like him.” I’m like, “I just don’t feel it. I’m just still stuck and let me get unstuck first. I needed to get unstuck.” Honestly, I’m not the stuck kind of gal so that bothered me too that I couldn’t manage it and I couldn’t control it. A few weeks later, Convene contacted me again and said, “We don’t want to bother you but John Wright would like to talk to you if you’re willing.” I’m like, “Who is John Wright?” Wally saw the email behind me and he hit yes. He hit yes in front of me. That afternoon, long story short, I was on the phone with John Wright with Convene. What I didn’t know is John Wright is the same guy that was sitting at the table at the strategic planning across from me when I told him I didn’t want to talk to him, the same guy.

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KIM: Wow.

KALEEN: Wally didn't know about him either and John on the phone he was laughing. He was kind of chuckling. "Why didn't you call me directly? You had my card." I go, "Who are you?" He goes, "I'm the guy that you basically told me to leave you alone at the strategic planning meeting." I put my head down on the table and I'm like, "You have got to be kidding me."

CHRIS: This cannot be happening.

KALEEN: Oh I was like, "I cannot believe this." I said, "I am so sorry." He said, "No." That's what I loved about him. He didn't dismiss it. He allowed me to be again. He said, "Would you have breakfast with me?" I said, "I'll give you one hour." He said, "Okay." So we met for breakfast and three hours later, as he sat and listened to my story, he didn't say one word and listened the whole time to my story. He didn't fix me, didn't spiritualize it, didn't criticize me, and that's what I needed. I needed to be heard, and I needed somebody just to listen. I knew what all the problems were. I didn't need somebody to tell me that God loves me because I know that. I know that but in the midst of the pain, tragedy, I didn't need to hear that. I needed somebody to sit with me and contain my story. That's what he did. He sat and contained my story.

KIM: What a gift.

KALEEN: Oh, I can't tell you and then he started telling me about his coaching practice. I looked at him and said, "You've got to be kidding me." I go, "I'm a mess. You want to take somebody that's got it kind of half together. My life is so not together right now." I go, "Give me some time." I kept saying, "Give me some time to get it together. Give me some time to get it together and then maybe we'll talk." He said, "Well, why don't I just put a proposal together, tell you what this could look like for you, and would you look at it?" I said, "Sure." "Well, needless to say, it has been almost two and a half

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years that we've been together. I can't say enough about John in the training that he has received. He's a learner so he has received a ton of training from different resources. He takes all of that and he brings it into our time together, but I know when I walk into his office, it's my time to listen to. What he has done is help me with a change of mindset. He has helped me to reframe my story so that it can be used and I'm not a 50-year-old woman sitting at my table in my kitchen not doing anything.

CHRIS: So John has worked with you in the coach approach, meeting you, helping you to call forth the vision, the passion, the call, and the sense of what this season needs to be, what you desire, what your heart is crying for, and then to dare to believe that with you, even for you sometimes when you begin to lose it, and to call you back to it not by a bunch of [inaudible 24:32] and you can do it but instead by questions – what is it that you want? Is that really what you want? What would that look like? When are you going to do that? Who can help you? - All that is, as you said, the finest of coaching. We've got a woman here who is in her 50s and it was the answer to something deep inside of you that is actually a pale reflection of the magnitude of what God is actually saying to you where he is saying, "You know what Kaleen and Wally, I have for you guys to begin moving in a much more radical direction than just, "Oh, you're going to care for your sister with special needs" or "Yeah, you're going to develop a program for those who are at Willow Creek to keep them from falling through the cracks."

Let me show you what I got here. We're going to start with a 200-member adult residential facility in the state that is dead last in terms of funding and support for special needs families and then we're going to kind of see what happens out of that. I mean, you've got a book in the works, right, and you're being called on to speak now before large groups. Take us into the really explosive sense now of the things God has for you in the midst of today.

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KALEEN: As I become healthier and working through my story and being more confident in my story, and honestly healing, God has allowed me to move out into the different arenas. I have been asked to speak at several churches, at the Builder's Special Needs Ministry. In the midst of it, people have come back to me that I have discipled and said, "You look different and there's something going with you. What is that?" I started sharing about my coaching and how I've moved into launching a coaching practice.

So I've started a practice and honestly in three months, I have 15 paying clients which I just am amazed that. It's different people that had been in my life so it's all true relationship for me that have heard our story, know our story, and I've had some kind of contact with. So they are not people I don't know. They are people that had been in my life over periods either in Illinois, different places where we've lived. And then by word of mouth, some of those people have gone out and shared, and it's just trickling. It's honestly trickling out, but it has all been through relationship. I have done no soliciting, no campaigns, nothing.

KIM: Yeah, but you've been authentic. You've been real about your story and not just the high points but the stuckness. If I can say to me, I think that's one of the most natural ways to share with people the benefits of coaching. It's not by talking about how they could benefit from us but how we benefited from our coach.

KALEEN: Exactly what I have been doing.

KIM: it doesn't feel braggadocios at all or any self promoting. As long as we walk the talk and all have our own coach, it's easy for me to rave about the benefits I get from my coach in a very natural way and it sounds like you do the same thing.

KALEEN: Yeah, I just talk about him all the time and I'm so grateful. The whole thing about listening well and asking great questions, I can't say enough about.

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CHRIS: Kaleen, let's underscore the point here because timeframe too, you are wrapping up Kim's class on the skills, tools, and techniques of becoming the coach, the introductory course there and you're wrapping up my business launch course, the Successful Coach, on just putting the infrastructure into place, getting your materials, getting incorporated, getting your forms that you'll use with your clients, scheduling, and how you receive their credit card payments and all the rest of that. You're wrapping that up. You've only been at this about four months, right? You have a case load and a steady income every month already, paid speaking gigs, etc. Is that all correct?

KALEEN: The caseload that I have is there are 15 paying clients. In that, I've done two groups and out of that, I've gotten clients as well.

CHRIS: Underscore another point or two that you made there as we're wrapping this up. Kim, you mentioned the impact that coaching has had in your life and how you shared that and it doesn't come across as braggadocios. You're not able to say, "Oh, here are all the wonderful things I can do for you," but instead, "this is how it has impacted me." Kaleen, you're experiencing the same thing. I often tell people I've been with coaches for the 17 years I've been in this field. I'm on my seventh coach now. I've had different ones for different seasons for different things, and they will say, "Oh but you run a coaching school and you teach other coaches." I say, "Yeah, that's right and I am far more intentional, far more likely to follow through on the bigness of some of the things I feel God has called me to when I'm working those out with my coach, when my coach is there alongside of me asking those questions." John Wright is not here. We're talking about him behind his back, but he'll hear this broadcast.

KALEEN: I told him. I said, "I'm talking about you all day today."

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CHRIS: But see John, as you were saying earlier in your talk, Kaleen, about kind of being lifelong learners and investing and training. John not only took training and coaching years ago just like you did with the John Maxwell group. John is in the training that we do here at this school. In fact, the majority of the chair persons in Convene are in our courses here at the Professional Christian Coaching Institute. There is this constant learner mindset not just about skills, tools, techniques, and mindset even, but about a way of approaching life. When we are in our learner mode instead of our nowhere mode, our expert mode, I believe we are so much more able to be used by God because it's keeping us on our tiptoes just as he encourages to do, seek, ask, knock. "Stay before me in an open genuinely curious exploratory space and watch what I will do through that. Behold, I will do a new thing." Will you not perceive it? When we're in a coach mode, we're looking to perceive. We're looking to receive those marching orders from Him what's next and then to be bold enough and encouraged by others enough to step into it.

KALEEN: Being in the church world which I love, I have loved church world. I love it and I thought I wanted to go back into it and about, I don't know, a year ago, I felt like, "I don't think I'll ever go back." I said, "I don't have the desire to go back. I need to move forward not back." I've worked through that to the point that honestly, Wally and I have had offers to move and to do other things in other churches and we've said no to all of them because we really believe this is where God wants us today.

CHRIS: Discerning seasons. For those of you who are listening and know you want to follow up with Kaleen and kind of hear a little bit more about her story and be encouraged first of all. As I mentioned earlier, she is working on a book. The book is tentatively titled right now, Kaleen can we give the title?

KALEEN: Yes.

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CHRIS: Tentatively titled Who Will Love Me? Again it's principally addressed to families of older, often adult special needs persons and helping those families wrestle through first coming to terms with the realities of what's going to be required and what state and federal laws may be in place that you might not know about but then helping you think through as critically and creatively out of the box ways of addressing this very real challenge. We know that Scripture is very clear that religion that our Lord considers as pure and just is this kind of living out of our faith, caring for those who are not able to care for themselves, but boy it does often come at a tremendous cost to the family unless we can hold all of the pieces before the Lord and see that in fact He has beautiful ways of making things not just kind of sort of work out. He is the Redeemer. He can work amazing things such as what you have illustrated for us through things when we bring them before Him. If you would like to connect personally with Kaleen, you'll be able to find her and her coaching practice out on the web at [www.KaleenMarshallCoaching.com](http://www.KaleenMarshallCoaching.com).

KIM: Well Kaleen, it was wonderful to have you with us today. Thank you so much for sharing your story and how God has used you, is using you, and a peek at the future which we're all excited to watch unfold as time goes by. Any final thoughts you'd like to leave our listeners with today?

KALEEN: Yeah, I have a final thought. A couple of weeks ago in a coaching session with one of my clients, she had me unwrap a gift at the end of the session. She said, "This is what you have modeled to me through your story." It's a coaster and it says "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone." I will say that my life began at 50 years old at the end of my comfort zone and I'm grateful.

KIM: Amen.

CHRIS: Wow, what a story, the power of our testimony, huh? Well gang if you want to find us on the web, you will find us at [ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com](http://ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com) and we of course encourage you

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since you find us on iTunes or Stitcher Radio, please leave comments. Those star ratings really help us and comments and forwarding us through your social media helps tremendously get the word out about what we're offering here. Until next time, keep raising the standard and changing the world.

KIM: God's richest blessings on you all.