Empathy

I was thinking overnight about some of the qualities which enable sports chaplains and sports mentors to be most effective in their work with coaches and competitors. One of those is Empathy. Empathy is the ability to see situations from another's point of view, to even feel what the other is feeling. Empathy shapes our attitudes and aligns our hearts and emotions to be most effective at communicating God's heart in any given situation.

For those of us in sports ministry, we need empathy to properly engage people's hearts. In failure, empathy helps me to feel the pain along with the player or coach. In success, empathy allows me to rejoice with them and to share their joy. In frustration, empathy keeps me from saying something foolish or acting as if their frustration is unwarranted or foolish. In pain, empathy keeps me from communicating in trite clichés. In loss, empathy keeps me from saying, "It's just a game," thus creating distance and distrust with the coaches and players.

Empathy is dangerous and brings about significant emotional and mental risks. It's easier and safer to stay aloof and untouched by the pain, frustration, loss and even the exhilaration of success. To remain untouched by these emotions limits our connection with those we serve. To risk the dangers of empathy also brings with it the reward of deep connection, trust and genuine community with those our friends in sport.

The challenge for today is to take the risks to empathize with the men and women of sport in your circle of influence. Give them your heart and trust the Lord to sustain you and to speak through you in the process.

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