

## **Widening the Circle**

### **Ready:**

"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Matthew 8:11

### **Set**

Shortly after I lost my job as Head Basketball Coach at Western Michigan University, we planned a first ever FCA Day of Champions at the site of my new job, Kalamazoo Valley Community College. We lined up a great day with Bill McCartney, Don Wharton, and a guy named Nick as our headliners. I witnessed over 23 first time commitments to Jesus during that powerful day of worship and celebration in our gym!

I'll never forget the comments Nick "the Greek" Pirovolos made that day when he saw the famous FCA picture of the young boy wearing the 18 jersey, holding a football and watching the group of older boys huddle in prayer. The title of that portrait is simply "Influence" and I, like so many others, was and still am, moved by the power of the role model responsibility it mirrors for all athletes. But, when Nick first saw that picture, he saw a young man OUTSIDE of the circle and asked "why is he outside the circle?"

Nick's background on the streets in the Hough Neighborhood in Cleveland, you see, had been filled with exclusion and rejection. He didn't see the influence factor that so many of us saw until we explained it to him. It reminded me then, as it does now, of our need as followers of Christ to make the circle as big as we can, to include all of God's children in the family of His love. Our participation in every competition must acknowledge that our opponent is not our enemy. Rather, he/she is simply a competitor seeking the same things we are: a chance to belong to something greater than ourselves, something to which we can give ourselves. We are called not only to acknowledge God's love, and to experience God's love, but also we are called to share God's love with everyone we meet, off and on the field.

I would maintain that the opportunity to make the greatest impact (influence) for Jesus will often be in the crucible moments of life—what some theologians call the thin places—where others might least expect to see it. In such moments the example of what it means to be a follower of Christ can perhaps shine the brightest. In such moments our submission to the will of God might best be seen as genuine, simply because it goes against our sinful and selfish nature. Such "letting go and letting God" moments can widen the circle by letting others see how much God loves us all—all the time. And, as important as it may seem at the time, the final score of any contest pales in significance when compared to our witness to the Christ, our Lord and Savior, who died on the cross for all of us.

### **Go**

1. How can I “widen the circle” through my athletic competition?
2. What attitude can I bring to my competition that will help give room for God’s spirit to move?
3. What, specifically, can I do daily to be able to witness for Christ right where I am?

## **Workout**

Matthew 28:19; Romans 14:11; Matthew 5:14

### **Bible Reference:**

Matthew 28:19

Romans 14:11



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