



# STAND IN THE GAP

*Bill McCartney*

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I once knew a football coach. He was a driven man who had sacrificed much to climb the ladder of his profession. This coach loved his job; he was energized by competition, inspired by success. His focus was hard and narrow. He traveled far and wide to charm a prized recruit, spent most waking hours assessing his team, evaluating last week's mistakes, sweating over next week's game plan. His mind was trained to detect the smallest chink in the enemy's armor, to exploit any advantage. Most days he was up and out of the house before anybody else was awake. Many nights he came home long after everyone had gone to bed.

He was not, however, a one-dimensional man. He was also a devoted Christian, unashamed of the gospel, energized and outspoken about God. He was quick to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ wherever he went. He attended church and, by all appearances, seemed like the real deal, a sincere believer, on fire for Jesus Christ—a humble servant of God.

If someone would have followed this coach from dawn to midnight, he would have seen him praying over his office quarters every morning, and heard him, on his lunch-time walk, ask God's blessing over each staff member and player. He would have beheld a man who talked a lot about God. But in reality, he would have discerned a man intoxicated with coaching, left with no choice but to conclude: "Coach says he's excited about God, but his actions tell me he's really excited about football. He says he's excited about his marriage, but he didn't even see his wife today. I think he's really excited about football." And finally, "Coaching takes so much of this man's time and energy. Coaching—not God—comes first in his life." And he would have been right.

By now you've guessed, the coach is me— or was me. While I wanted balance in my life, there was imbalance. I meant well—I would share the gospel with anyone. I would boldly preach Christ in public, share my love for God. And there is no doubt, in the off-season God got substantially more of my time. But there was a contradiction in my daily walk with God. My heart, while it longed for deeper connection to God, was sold out to my profession, to competition, to whatever it took to win football games. I knew about winning football; I needed to know more about loving "the Lord your God with all of your heart and with your soul and with all your strength."

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