

What the Mainstream Media Won't Tell You About the Rio 2016 Olympics

Since the 2016 Summer Olympics kicked off their opening ceremonies last Friday, the world's eyes have been fixated on Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to enjoy the competitive feats by 207 Olympic teams, representing 206 countries plus the Refugee Olympic Team.

And in the midst of this athletic competition that gathers people from around the globe is a unique evangelism opportunity that only comes once every other year—one that Athletes in Action is fully engaged in.

Tim Pitcher is at the Rio Olympics right now with Athletes in Action, a partner ministry of The JESUS Film Project. The Athletes in Action team has around 100 diverse and multilingual staff members engaging athletes and families and being a spiritual encouragement.

"They're here to be able to minister to the athletes from their country or their language group and really try through some initiative evangelism to be able to meet with them, resource them, so if they go back home, they're going to have copies of God's Word that they can get through security and customs that a normal missionary might not," shares Pitcher.

"[When] Rio finishes and they all start going home, the gospel seeds will be spread on all the various lives as they're going home to their final destinations. It's a very strategic opportunity to equip and spread the gospel."

Some of the Athletes in Action staff are even serving as chaplains inside the Olympic Village.

"The role of a chaplain is really to be here to serve and meet the needs of the athletes and their families," Pitcher explains, "so everything from chapel services to Bible study and prayer time, to helping meet the needs such as even just earlier this morning helping one of the athletes whose family housing fell through and helping them arrange to find a new location for them to stay when they arrive."

The message of the gospel meets people's desires for worth and value in telling them where their true value comes from. And it doesn't come from the medals draped around the necks of the winners.

"The Olympics are such a unique opportunity because the athletes train for three or four years for this one moment in time. So there's a lot of stress, a lot of emotion, so we need to be here to help them as they process through that. I've had conversations with athletes who are dealing with anxiety. Some of whom have been training these four years and now they're injured and trying to deal with that.

"For some, it's just to remind them of God's Word and the peace and the power He provides. For others it's to help them to see that through a personal relationship with Christ, that their value and their identity is based off of what God says about them, and not what their coaches say, and so that can lead into evangelistic conversations with them."

Another aspect of the ministry with Athletes in Action is giving out free materials and resources to the Olympians and their families.

"We have a Bible that was created for Rio and we're handing them out to the athletes, as well as a devotional plan that we have on YouVersion, and a DVD called 'Struggle and Triumph' which features the stories of [five] different Olympic athletes and the struggles they've had physically, emotionally, spiritually through their sport; and then now

through their faith in Christ, it has brought them to a triumphant point who they are in Christ.”

The ‘Struggle and Triumph’ film is also free on The JESUS Film app, another key ministry tool that can go a long way.

“We partner with The JESUS Film and we use their app, and so this ‘Struggle and Triumph’ film is on their app in over 40 languages, so they can download the app and see the different profiles [such as] Wilson Kipsang, the marathoner from Kenya, and how his teammate actually won him to Christ through just being a light to him.

“Or for Li Yan, an Olympic speed skater and coach from China and just how people initiated her when she was in the US and in Europe and invited her to church, and through that relationship led her to Christ. Now she has an impact on her team, and through her story she’s able to now impact the millions of people from China and those living outside of China who are interested in her story.”

If you’d like to get involved, there’s an Athletes in Action prayer team you can join! Pitcher gives us more details:

“We started an Olympic prayer team and you can just go you can sign up and you’ll get an email where you’re going to get the names of five Olympic athletes randomly chosen by the computer. You can be praying for those athletes and following their Olympic journeys ... As you pray for them, we give some prayer suggestions, how God will open doors for them to meet the chaplains or to receive a Bible.”

Pitcher also has a more personal prayer request. “As well, be praying for the missionaries that are here. We need God favor to open doors, get us through security. And then as well, [pray] for even our families that are back home.”