

Get In The Game

Batter Up!

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What makes hitting a baseball consistently so hard? Many things. For one, with a 95 mph fastball crossing home plate in .4 seconds, that leaves the batter a mere .25 seconds to decide whether he is going to swing or not. Put another way, at twelve feet from the pitcher the batter must instantly read the type of pitch coming toward him. At thirty feet, the batter must start his swing if he is going to make solid contact. At 48 feet, the batter's eye blinks at 300-400 milliseconds causing him not to see the fast moving ball. At 60 feet or 4/10ths of a second the ball reaches home plate. Hopefully, at this point the batter's round bat is on the proper plane to hit the fast moving round ball headed for the hungry catcher's glove.

Difficulty in hitting is also compounded by the type of pitches the skilled pitcher has in his bag of tricks.

- *Four-seam fastball.* This is used for maximum ball velocity and is the pitch from which all others are formed.
- *Two-seam fastball.* Also called a sinker, this pitch simply sinks towards a right handed batter if the pitcher is right handed as it reaches the plate.
- *Cut-fastball.* Since the ball is held a little off center by the pitcher, the ball typically runs away from the pitcher's arm side, making it a little slower than a four-seam fastball. It is hard to hit because it will be moving away from a right handed batter and into the



- inside zone of a left-handed batter.
- *Split-finger fastball*. As this ball approaches you, it simply dives down quickly as it approaches the plate, leaving many batter's clumsily swinging at, well, nothing but air.
 - *Change-up*. This pitch is thrown exactly like a fastball. The pitcher has the same wind up rotation as a fastball; however, his arm speed is slightly slower, resulting in a ball which moves toward the plate with the speed of a fast snail. Believe me. This pitch throws the batter's timing off big-time, causing him to swing way too early.
 - *Slider*. It is in between a curveball and a fastball, and has less downward movement. As such, it has a tighter, quicker break as it approaches/crosses the plate. It also is typically 9-12 mph slower than a four seam fastball, and it breaks some 3-6 inches. It will break away from the right-handed batter if the pitcher is right handed, and it will come in quickly on a left-handed batter.
 - *Knuckleball*. This ball has almost no spin and tends to just float toward the plate, and most batters feel like they could swing a couple of times as it creeps toward them.
 - *Curveball*. Its velocity is much slower than the fastball and it curves down as it reaches the plate. It also has a wider break than the slider, moving between 12 and 6 inches. Many pitchers use this as a strikeout pitch because it is hard to hit and it throws off the timing of the batter, who is typically primed for a much faster pitch.

With literally milliseconds to decide which pitch is coming toward you, you have your work cut out for you if you want to be an effective hitter.

Hitting, in many respects, is like giving to support the work and movement of God. How so? Sometimes you're doing well hitting the fast ball called planned, consistent giving, but at other times, based on what God is doing in the world around you, you get the proverbial curve ball called spontaneous giving. What kind of providential pitch is this? It's the pitch God throws your way as you mature in your spiritual batting skills to challenge you to swing and hit in a new fashion. As we've seen by analyzing the play of the *Macedonian Mudville Nine* in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, they knew how to hit this pitch when God brought a spiritual need before them. They identified it, waited for the ball to break back in the box, and then they went for it in a big fashion.

Next up were the *Carnal Corinthians*. They boasted like big batters a year prior that they could hit this particular curve ball all day long, but now as the pitch approached the box, Paul, their coach and ours, wanted to make sure they drilled this ball to the opposite field for a nice hit. In chapter 9 of his second letter to the team, Paul excitedly shared with them what I'll call . . .

Timely Tips For Hitting The Spontaneous Giving Curveball (2 Corinthians 9:1-15)

Believe me, we can all learn from Paul's astute analysis here because we have our own spontaneous giving curveball coming straight at us. God has brought so many people to our team, which none of us anticipated, we are merely following his lead in building \$16 million in new facilities to not only minister to the team members, but to also prepare for more team members in the future. Our current goal is to raise \$2 million to add to the \$6 million we've raised to comfortably realize this God-directed goal, and today is the day we challenge all our

players to get in the game by jumping on this spontaneous giving curveball by turning in a financial commitment card you have prayed over. We will collect those cards at the end of our service, but for now, we need to touch upon Paul's analysis of how to hit this type of divinely ordained curve ball with a high degree of success. From the well-worn pages of his playbook, we can easily isolate five crucial batting tips for hitting this type of curve ball.

Batting Tip #1: Follow Through With The Right Timing (2 Corinthians 9:1—5)

Hitting a spontaneous giving curveball is all about timing. You don't want to hit it at the front of the box. No, you want to wait a little bit and let it break more to the back of the box. Then, you jump on it, typically driving it away from you. Remember, hitting this ball is all about controlling your timing, of waiting "a little longer" before you unleash the power of your bat. But unleash you must if you are going to hit it well. Such is what we see played out in Paul's words to team Corinth. Listen and learn.

¹ For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, *namely*, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; ⁴ otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

You will remember that a year prior to this, team Corinth has said, "Paul, we'll hit this curve ball by giving wholeheartedly to the financial need you say is present in the Jerusalem church." You know, it is one thing to say you are going to hit this type of pitch, and quite another to actually do it.

It's now game time a year later. The question in the coaching team's mind was simple: *Will the Corinthian team actually hit this curve ball called spontaneous giving?* They said they would. They said they could. Their extremely, well-advertised verbal confidence and financial ability has motivated other players on surrounding teams in the Achaia Grecian Southern Division. Will they make the coaches proud of their batting prowess, or will they just let the pitch go by them? Will they wait for the ball to break before they drill it by giving profoundly, or will they let their love of things keep them from having any bat action at all?

The curve ball called spontaneous giving now approached the plate. It started breaking as team Corinth waited for the right moment to strike. It was now time to swing away with explosive power, holding nothing back.

Metaphorically, the same applies to us at team Burke Community. For those who've already made a financial commitment to give to this curve ball God has thrown our way, Paul is saying, don't forget to swing away. For those who've not yet hit this particular ball, I've been telling you for three weeks this pitch is coming. I've challenged you to pray about how you will financially propose to hit it, and now that fast moving breaking ball is about the cross the plate. It's time to jump all over this pitch like the team members on the Macedonian Mudville Nine

did. They, who were poor, gave out of their poverty in a way which took the coaching staff breath away. My prayer, as your coach, is you, too, would give in a fashion which would be one of those hits recorded for the ages where this church is concerned.

Timing is everything in hitting the spontaneous curveball, but since your timing is perfect right now, I know you'll hit like you've never hit before.

Batting Tip #2: Don't Be Afraid To Swing Away (2 Corinthians 9:6)

Yes, don't freeze up as the curve approaches. Don't let this slower, ultimately easier pitch to hit go by so you can wait for your pitch. This is *your* pitch. So don't hold back. Let 'er rip, potato chip. Isn't this what Paul tells team Corinth in so many words? Indeed.

⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

In hitting language this equation works like this: *If you swing little, you hit little. If you swing much, you hit much.* If you stand in the box constantly waiting for your pitch, chances are greater you aren't going to hit that well. In fact, you may be caught looking at the third strike more often than not. Far better to swing.

Paul's coaching analogy here comes from the world of farming. The size of a given harvest is utterly dependent on how much seed the farmer spreads on the fertile ground. Paul, a coach trained by some of the greatest rabbinical coaches of the day, drew this logical observation from the book of Proverbs:

²⁴ There is one who scatters, and *yet* increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, *and yet it results* only in want. ²⁵ The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. ²⁶ He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells *it* (Proverbs 11).

When it comes to the monies the Team Owner has placed in your care as his money manager, are you paying more to yourself, or are you playing more on the field of play when opportunities come your way? For those who invest more, the Team Owner promises to bless them more. The flipside is true, as well. If you, say, chose to invest less in the curve balls he throws your way, you can bank on the fact his overall blessing on your life will not be as profound as if could have been. It's just how play breaks down on his field called life.

Let's take a look at an ancient team who convinced themselves to scatter little while making sure they had plenty. The team was the Post-Exile Israelite Cubs and for years they had built their homes, all while letting God's temple sit in total disrepair. Coach Haggai sought to motivate the team with these biting words:

⁵ Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! [or, consider how you are not hitting] ⁶ "You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is not enough* to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is not enough* to become drunk; *you* put on clothing, but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages *to put* into a purse with holes." ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! ⁸ "Go up to the mountains, bring wood

and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD.⁹ “You look for much, but behold, *it comes* to little; when you bring it home, I blow it *away*. Why?” declares the LORD of hosts, “Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house.¹⁰ “Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce.¹¹ “I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.”

I'm sure the Israelite Cubs were looking down at their cleats during this chalk talk. The Team Owner wanted to pour out his blessings on them, but they, first, had to put him first in their giving. And putting him first would start with sowing financially toward his Temple reconstruction in a sacrificial, selfless fashion. If they would do this, if they would put him first, if they would sow bountifully, they would hit like they had never hit before.

All of this certainly rings true with us because God's truth is absolute, transcending the passage of time. Some sow financially in a meager fashion and then wonder why things in their life are not lining up. Others sow bountifully and watch God open the windows of heaven to bless their lives in a powerful way. Does this mean he makes them wealthy? No. Such is the false teaching from team *Prosperity Gospel Astros*. The problem with this team's philosophy is it is man-centered, not God-centered. It focuses on what God will give me, not on what I will give to him. It's all about getting, not about giving. God's blessing come in many ways, and it is not always tied to finances. It can be about lives changed because you gave money to the Gideon's to buy Bibles. It can be about lives changed because you support mission work in the Middle East. It can be about lives changed as you gave money to build buildings where thousands of people can learn about the person and work of Jesus and how to live for him in a godless world.

R. G. LeTourneau, the man who invented earthmoving machines and became the founder of LeTourneau University in Longview, Texas, knew how to sow bountifully to God's causes. In his lifetime, as God blessed him greatly, he worked his way to giving away 90% of his wealth to God's team. Think of the thousands of lives he touched, and still touches, because he understood what bountiful giving was all about

What about you? Do you give to God sparingly or bountifully? More precisely, I think you need to ask yourself, What would bountiful giving to this **BATTER UP!** giving program really look like in your life? To go back to our baseball metaphor, I must ask, “Are you one who swings as the spontaneous curve balls come your way, or are you caught looking with the bat on your shoulder?” Again, I challenge you to swing away and watch God move in an amazing fashion in your life.

A third tip is equally practical.

Batting Tip #3: Be Excited About Your Swing (2 Corinthian 9:7)

Ever swung at a bad pitch and knew it as you committed yourself? Been there. Done that. What the Team Owner wants is for us to collectively learn to be confident and excited that we have decided based on our own hitting analysis to jump on a given spontaneous curve ball. Paul says this much in the next line from his player notes.

⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

God isn't forcing you to swing financially. That's just not his style. He who loved you and sent his only Son to die on the cross to bear your sin wants you to love him back from your heart, especially as you give to him. He wants your commitment to hit this curve ball to be your idea, your purpose. He wants you to swing all on your own power, and he wants you to do it with a great, joyous attitude. He doesn't want to hear you sigh as you swing with a frown on your face. Far from it. He's looking for batters who are happy they are being given the unique opportunity to meet a financial need within the body of Christ that God has sent their way.

So, what about it? How's your attitude as this curve ball is moving toward the plate? Are you *sneering* or *smiling*?

Batting Tip #4: Realize Your Hitting Prowess Leads To Other Hitting Opportunities (2 Corinthians 9:8-11)

I love this section of Paul's coaching analysis because it is so helpful and insightful:

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹ as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER."¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

After reading this, I have a question for would be batters: *When you hit the spontaneous curve ball well by giving in a radical fashion, and God responds by blessing your hitting even more, why does he send abundance and blessing, be what it may?* Does he enrich your life so you can live as bigger getters? Such is the erroneous thinking, again, of the *Prosperity Gospel Astros*. Such is not the thinking of the Team Owner, God, as Paul states clearly and definitively here.

God blesses your sacrificial giving so you will have more to pour into more good deeds. You might need to read that truth one more time. This time let it sink and alter your paradigm about giving to God as you hit the spontaneous curve ball. God is generous to you so you can be generous to others. Additionally, God enriches our lives when we enrich other lives by meeting needs so we can, in turn, enrich more lives. Or to tap into what Paul articulates in verse 10, God enriches us with more seed and more hits so we can have a greater harvest of personal righteousness, which is a far cry from having a harvest of more money. God's blessing on your life, as Randy Alcorn points out many times in his book *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, is not about increasing your *standard of living*, but to increase your *standard of giving*.

In a few minutes, you'll be given, as God's batters in this body, the opportunity to seize a giving endeavor God has placed before you because he has blessed you. Yes, the rich blessing resting on your life right now is there specifically for you to give toward this divinely orchestrated giving program. And when you give toward this realize he will not only bless you more, but he will set up yet another game where he'll call you to swing away financially to impact souls for eternity. Such is the way his kingdom works in the here and now. How exciting.

A fifth batting tip where spontaneous curve balls is concerned is inscribed upon the four closing verses of Paul's batting analysis:

Batting Tip #5: Connecting With This Ball Brings Glory To The Team Owner (2 Corinthians 9:12-15)

Isn't this what being a team member on God's team is all about anyway? It's not about us getting the glory for how well we've played the spiritual game, but about him getting the glory. This is exactly what Coach Paul says in his wrap up counsel:

¹² For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints,

Hold it right there. When you spontaneous give to a need God brings your way, that need is eventually met, be what it may. This is what being a Christian is all about, is it not? We are here to meet the needs of those around us, to touch lives, and to alleviate pain and suffering, as our Lord most assuredly did.

Beyond this, however, when we step up and hit the curve ball called spontaneous giving it naturally results in praise and glory flowing from the mouths of people to the throne of God:

. . . but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for *your* obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, ¹⁴ while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

Giving God glory is what our field of play is all about. The Psalmist knew about this aspect and goal of our play back in his day when he wrote these words,

¹Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; bring an offering and come into His courts (Psalm 96).

There is really nothing greater you can do in life than give the living God glory in and through your life, and if people glorify him through your selfless, sacrificial giving, then that is all fine too. And while we, along with Paul, are thinking about selfless, sacrificial giving, how can we not think about Jesus. That's why Paul concludes his player notes in this passage with these exclamatory words:

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Jesus gave us everything in order to bless our lives. How can we, then, not give as gave or play as he played?

So, what about it? Did the Corinthians hit this particular curve ball to God's glory? Did they give selflessly and sacrificially resulting in the needs of Jerusalem Christians being met and God getting the glory? Here's what we read at the end of Romans:

²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

Obviously, they hit the curve ball out of the park! Now it is our turn at bat on a different day, in a different stadium, and with a different need. For three weeks we've been standing in the warm up circle, but now we hear the familiar:

BATTER UP!

You walk over to the chalk-lined box, hitting the dirt clods off your cleats before you step in. Once inside you dig your cleats into the soft, red dirt. You take a couple of practice swings as you eyeball the pitcher, giving him your best game face. He shakes off the first sign from the catcher and then nods in approval at the next sign. Slowly and methodically he winds up as his eyes are laser locked on the catcher's worn leather mitt, and, then here comes the white ball, exploding off his fingers. What kind of pitch is it? It's a spontaneous giving curveball. What are you going to do with it? You're going to jump on it, I just know it.