

# Get In The Game

## Batter Up!

Written By  
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**S**ometimes God puts you in a spiritual game where you know you must play like you've never played before. Great players know the drill and aren't afraid to step up to the plate and swing away.

Sam and Lucille, an 80 plus year-old-retiree couple at my last church, knew not only how to play hard financially for the Lord's local team on a weekly basis, but they also knew when God called them to go above and beyond to do something great for the Team Owner. When our ministry to the beautiful retirement compound where they lived exploded, we needed a shuttle bus to pick up all the folks who couldn't drive so they could get to church. Realizing the pivotal spiritual moment in this particular game, these first and second hitters in our lineup (who are now both home with the Lord), stepped into the batter's box and wrote a check out for \$43,000, enabling us to continue to reach a whole new group of people for Jesus Christ.

I will never forget how this godly couple played the game for God. They played selflessly, faithfully, and creatively. They supported the work of the local church on a perpetual basis, and when a special opportunity developed in the game, one which called for financial sacrifice, they put on their game faces and did what the Spirit of God led them to.

How are you playing the spiritual game of giving here at Burke Community Church? Is this not the question? Indeed. From the story of the *Wonderful Widow* in our last chalk talk, we learned how the Team Owner, God, does, in fact, watch how we play when we give. We also learned He gauges our level of play based on whether we give radically, at times, when the game calls for it, or whether we just give from our surplus. Again, I, then, must you: How are you playing

the spiritual game of giving? Are you playing like Sam and Lucille and the Wonderful Widow, or are you just letting them carry the team, as it were?

To help get you get in the game, I want to introduce you to some additional giving hitters on God's team. The old projector reels from the first century A.D., which are labeled 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, show them in action in a big game. Who are they? The one team we'll call the *Macedonian Mudville Nine*. The second team we'll identify as the *Carnal Corinthians*. Both were hitters for God back in the day, and from analyzing their play as the projector plays we'll quickly learn this one central premise:

## The Team Owner Wants Each Player To Learn The Art Of Spontaneous Giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-15)

Before we watch the reels, let me reacquaint you with the context of this particular major game about giving.

A year prior, Titus, part of the coaching staff with the Apostle Paul, mentioned the financial need of the poor *Jerusalem Red Sox*, the mother of all church teams in the world at the time, to the *Carnal Corinthians*, a financial powerhouse of a team. Their Gentile players got all excited and motivated to help alleviate the need of the struggling Jewish team, and they promised to spontaneously give to make this crucial and strategic team solvent once again. A year later, however, and their giving had just amounted to a whole lot of, well, big, bold, braggadocios talk. Like a good coach, Paul wrote them this communique on team letterhead in 2 Corinthians 8 to help motivate them to financially hit like they had never hit before.

Motivation. Maybe that is what you need. You know of our current team's special financial need in light of our off-the-charts divinely ordered growth (\$2 million for this second phase of our giving program), you know we need to expand the clubhouse and the stadium to accommodate all the growth, but you, like the players in Corinth have moved from initial enthusiasm to procrastination. Believe me, this is not one of those moments to freeze up at the plate. No. This is one of those divine moments where the Team Owner wants you to be radical and spontaneous with your giving so we can be adequately prepared to cut deeper into the Devil's team.

As you watch these timely tapes from 2 Corinthians 8, you will quickly see two points emerge detailing how the Team Owner inspired Paul, the coach, to inspire current hitters to hit like never before.

## The Coach Highlights Performers To Motivate (2 Corinthians 8:1-9)

In these first nine verses, Paul, the coach who founded team Corinth, seeks to motivate them to get on with giving to the special need with the *Jerusalem Red Sox* by showcasing the amazing field of play evidenced by the *Macedonian Mudville Nine*. Is this biblical? Is it proper to highlight and disclose how other team members have played, financially speaking, in order to challenge other team members to swing away? That's a good question.

Remember the major hitter named Barnabas? The playbook records his financial play in a big game:

<sup>36</sup> Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup> and who

owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Amazing. Barnabas advanced the early team by selling some land he had and donating all of the proceeds. Have you ever played like that? Have you ever sacrificed like this? Have you ever seen a team need and spontaneously and sacrificially given over and above your normal giving? That's why we're still talking about Barnabas today, and it is all right for us to know what he did. In Matthew 6:1, Jesus warns, "*Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them.*" Key here is the last phrase, "*to be seen by them.*" God is against us doing spiritual disciplines, like giving, prayer, fasting and so forth solely to be seen by people so they think we're spiritual. As He says, when you do this you have your (inferior and temporal) reward.

What Jesus didn't say is we should never know what other saints, with the right motivations, might be doing for the sake of righteousness. That is why the giving of Barnabas is disclosed. His motivation was pure and served to motivate saints. That is why the book of Numbers discloses the names of the donors to the tabernacle and First Chronicles 29 talks openly about how the people gave freely to the building of the Temple. If giving is supposed to be entirely private at all times, then why isn't prayer and fasting also private at all times too? Remember, the same command to not do your works of righteousness . . . like giving, praying, and fasting . . . in public in order to receive the praise and adoration of men readily shows it is not all supposed to be private. If it were, we would never pray from this podium or in this building again with other saints. What is prohibited is flaunting what we are doing in order to garner the accolades of people. Care is warranted, but disclosure is not to be completely benched.

Enter team Macedonia as a case study of motivation. Paul, like a wise coach, showcases their spontaneous and sacrificial giving to this special cause in order to educate and motivate the Corinthian team. If this was verboten, he would have never done it. The fact he presents these saints readily demonstrates there are times when it is appropriate to highlight saints who know how to play the giving game for God's team.

From the play of the *Macedonian Mudville Nine*, you will quickly isolate three key concepts which served to motivate them to give, and which, by definition, should have motivated the Corinthians to give and us by proxy.

*Key Players have the right attitude* (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). Attitude is everything in the sport of spiritual baseball. As one once said, "A bad attitude is like a flat tire. If you don't change it, you'll never go anywhere."<sup>1</sup> The Macedonian certainly didn't have this problem:

<sup>1</sup> Now, brethren, we *wish* to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality

Because the Macedonians really understood and appreciated the grace God had poured out on them in saving them, they were simply excited and pumped up to give to team Jerusalem. Yes, despite their abject poverty, which we probably brought on by the Romans seizing their silver and gold mines, while taxing their copper and iron smelting and prohibiting their ability to cut down trees for building homes and ships, not to mention the numerous wars the Romans brought to their soil, these saints couldn't wait to give. What a positive attitude despite a less than optimal life financial picture. Financial distress could also have occurred from open persecution of the

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<sup>1</sup>InspirationBoost.com

team by a godless, intolerant society. Whatever the reasons for their poverty, it didn't dampen their positive attitude when it came to giving to a special need God brought their way. Joy, of all character traits, about getting the opportunity to give spontaneously to a major church need simply empowered them. Actually, it overflowed from their lives like a mighty, unstoppable river. Makes you want to ask yourself, "Is joy a driving factor in this new **BATTER'S UP** giving program? Does the smile on my face betray just how excited I am to give in support of what God is doing here in northern Virginia through this church?"

A bad attitude could have easily arisen from this financially strapped team:

- What, us give? Are you kidding?
- Look around you, Paul. Does it look like we are in any position to help others?
- We just changed churches when we moved here from Thessalonica and here we go again with another team need. Really?

Thankfully, this was not their attitude. They heard about the opportunity to make a difference for God and they collectively said, "We can't wait to be part of the solution." Is that your attitude? Better yet, which is your attitude?

*Key Players have the right approach* (2 Corinthians 8:2-3). Check out what this point connotes:

<sup>2</sup> that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. <sup>3</sup> For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,

These Macedonians, like the Wonderful Widow of Mark 12 fame, were far from tight.

Liberality defined their approach to giving. The Greek here is *aplotaytos* (ἀπλότητος) and it can also be translated *generosity*. What do you want when you purchase a hot fudge Sundae? You want the operator to go overboard, to load it up with ice cream, and to be liberal and generous with the hot fudge, nuts, and cherries (I speak about one who had his first job at *Thirty One Flavors/Baskin Robbins*. Boy, were we liberal when we made ourselves a treat after work). Such activity is what best describes the giving of the Macedonian team to the church need at the moment. They didn't just give a little. No, they, like the Wonderful Widow, went above and beyond what was probably anticipated by Paul. Once more, it makes you put your bat down and ask yourself, "When's the last time I batted like this for God?" Here's a practical follow up question, "What would liberal/generous giving look like in my life, anyway?" Ask God and He will show you, I'm sure of it.

Additionally, don't miss the next pivotal player point:

*Key Players have the right acknowledgement* (2 Corinthians 8:5). The Macedonians knew from the beginning the game couldn't and shouldn't be played on their terms. Listen and learn from their method of play:

<sup>5</sup> and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Note the order here. First, they gave themselves as players to the Lord, who really owned their net worth anyway, and then they told Paul, the coach, "We are on your team and are prepared to play hard for you." What a mindset! They heard of the need, took a knee as a team and said, "Lord,

we are your players and what we have is yours. Yes, our time, talents, and treasures all belong to you so we restate that fact to you to let you know we are serious about following hard after you. And, Paul, our shepherd, we are here to support your leadership of our team 100%.” Show me a team member who’s growing in their ability to give to God, and I’ll show you someone who submits themselves to God and to biblical leadership.

Maybe your prayer today needs to be something like this: Lord, here I am. All I have is yours. All I will have is yours. I give myself to you and I stand behind and with my local shepherd to do my part in accomplishing what you’ve laid before us.” Folks, that is some kind of acknowledgement, and it rightfully marks the difference between winning teams and mediocre ones. What kind of team will we be? I see us as one which is comprised of a little of Macedonia and Corinth. If you are a Macedonian, I commend and thank the Lord for your level of play. If you are Corinthian, I not only share the Macedonian model to motivate you, I challenge you to consider what might be inhibiting your level of play in the area of giving by focusing on the performance problems of the ancient Corinthian team. This is exactly what Paul does as the ensuing verses demonstrate:

### The Coach Highlights Performance To Illuminate (2 Corinthians 8:6-15)

If a player isn’t hitting well, it’s only logical for a coach to let the player know how he can improve. I don’t know how many times I heard the coach say things like . . .

- “You’re taking your eye off the ball.
- “You’re backing out of the box. Stay in the box.”
- “You’re opening up your stance.”
- “You’re dropping your shoulder.”
- “You’re not attacking the ball.”
- “You’re swinging up not through the ball.”
- “You’re back too far in the box. Move up.”
- “You’re crowding the plate. Move away.”

Any coach who cares about his players won’t waste any time fine-tuning their hitting so they, along with the entire team, will benefit from the progress. In the verses which close out this part of the play reel, Paul highlights five things which kept the *Carnal Corinthians* from being renamed the *Spiritual Corinthians* in relation to giving. As we click down through this divinely inspired list, ask yourself the logical question, “Lord, am I employing any of these inferior batting techniques when it comes to giving to support what you are doing?”

First up, . . .

*Imbalance diminishes a player’s giving average* (2 Corinthians 8:6-8). Watch how Paul develops this all important coaching point:

<sup>6</sup> So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. <sup>7</sup> But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.

<sup>8</sup> I am not speaking *this* as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

Paul informs team Corinth that Coach Titus would be returning to motivate them to fulfill the giving they had promised a year ago, and his arrival would be preceded by the stellar play of the Macedonians. The point can't be missed. Since the poor Macedonians followed through in a big fashion, the Corinthians should follow through as well.

They did, from the Coach's perspective, have a balance problem with their hitting. Again, like a seasoned, wise coach, Paul built the Corinthian team up by first highlighting five things they did well. They were major players when it came to Bible study, Bible learning, preaching, being passionate about their faith and loving other saints (while they did have their moments, as the two letters attest). Yet, despite their great play in these coveted areas, they had not excelled in the area of giving, especially when it came to spontaneous giving to a unique spiritual opportunity. This imbalance, therefore, lowered their spiritual batting average. Isn't this what happens? We excel in using a whole bunch of spiritual gifts God has put at our disposal (1 Corinthians 12), while being myopic regarding developing the gift of gracious, liberal giving. Is your spiritual walk out of balance? Make this day where you tell God you are going to fix the imbalance by stepping up to give liberally and generously to the opportunity at hand.

A second batting average killer is presented in the next two powerful verses:

*Forgetfulness diminishes a player's giving average* (2 Corinthians 8:9). When you are a new Christian and you still feel the humbling power of God's grace which saved you, it's hard to forget what He has really done for your soul. The older you get in the faith, the more spiritual water that has passed under the bridge, the more battles you've seen and fought, the more triumphs and tragedies you've faced the easier it is to lose sight of the person and work of your Savior, Jesus Christ. Sure, you know theologically what He did for you on the cross when He died for your sin, why, you can easily proof text and teach it when asked. What is lacking is a fresh insight about His salvific work, one which can and will propel you to give as He has given to you. Paul talks about this batting issue starting in verse 9:

<sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

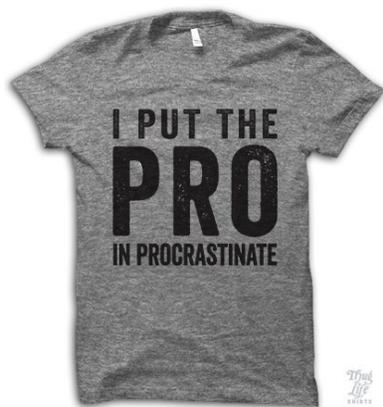
Jesus, the Lord of glory, the One who created all the stars and planets, who fashioned the oceans, lakes, and rivers we enjoy, and who fashioned all the beauty and intricacies we see on a daily basis (Colossians 1:16-17), the Eternal God (John 8:58) who ruled from a magnificent throne over the seen and unseen worlds, He left all of that to become a man . . . and not just any man, a despised man, a man from a hated minority, a man with little financial means, a hardworking man as he gave himself to his father's construction business, a man who eventually had no place to lay his head even though he could have created a pillow with a mere word. As Paul says in Philippians 2:6-8, Jesus restricted some of his eternal attributes so he could come to earth and be, not a king, but the servant of all servants in order to go to a cross to die for our sin, not his sin. Moving, isn't it? Instructional and motivational too. He gave up much to we could gain much. Talk about sacrifice. No one has ever given so much as he has given to us.

Those players who really remember the high level of Christ's sacrifice will have no problem giving much to Him when it is called for. They won't have to be coerced or begged. No. They will naturally give much because they know and remember constantly what He gave to them. The Macedonians were those kind of players. God's grace poured out to them through the person and work of Jesus on the cross was something they would never forget. Logically, that understanding moved them, likewise, to grace giving.

As I said, for over a year the Carnal Corinthians had not given as they had promised. Obviously, as Coach Paul points out, they had conveniently forgotten how much their Lord had given to save them in the first place. He had given everything, then how could they not give generously with the need the coach now placed before them? Be honest, if your giving batting average is sub-par, there is good chance it's directly tied to once simple fact: you are forgetting the cost of your salvation. Your Savior sacrificed much willingly and lovingly, for you. How can you not, then, give willingly and lovingly, to Him and his cause?

Third, spiritual hitting is thwarted by a word we are all familiar with, but are tempted to look at later.

*Procrastination diminishes a players giving average* (2 Corinthians 8:10-11). What is procrastination? Putting off something for later you should be getting to right now. Are you so skilled at this technique? The Corinthians were. Here are some shirts they could have worn with pride. Procrastinators are far from being pros, especially if they are on God's team. Follow closely Paul's words to these foot-dragging, knuckle-dragging team members:



<sup>10</sup> I give *my* opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do *this*, but also to desire *to do it*. <sup>11</sup> But now finish doing it also, so that just as *there was* the readiness to desire it, so *there may be* also the completion of it by your ability.

He tells them it is not a divine command they start hitting hard regarding giving to this spontaneous need; however, it is his opinion they can and should follow through on what they promised to do financially. Put you've said you are going to do prudent and wise for you to word. To do any less is to show

differently, Paul just feels if something, then it is only follow through and fulfill your a weakness in your character.

Can you think of who were awash in finances were procrastinating? I can comments:



reasons why the Corinthians, compared to the Macedonians, just hear the manana

- My stocks have I've got to pull
- I just launched a new business venture and I need all the capital I can get my hands on.
- My first child just headed to the University of Athens, so things are tight around our home.
- We'll give when my wife finds another job. She was at Sport's Authority near the coliseum, but they went belly up so we are struggling.
- We'll give when I pay off my last chariot. We bought a new one last year with a five year payoff, so we'll eventually be in a better giving situation.
- Since we talked last, we just sunk a large chunk of our disposable income into a new room addition and a new kitchen in our older home.

taken a hit this year, so back.

- I'm nearing retirement and we need to save for a few more years before we start making any kind of major financial gifts.
- I just gave to the building program of the church I attended near Sparta, so I'm really not interested in giving again until I recoup some of my cash.

What should procrastinators do? Stop making excuses for not giving liberally and generously to support God's special work, and start following through on a real hard number you lay before God.

Here's another problem for spiritual hitters when it comes to giving to God:

*Excuses diminish a player's giving average* (2 Corinthians 8:12-15). Ouch. Benjamin Franklin once quipped, "He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else."<sup>2</sup> From what we read in the closing verses of Paul's analysis of the batting average of the Corinthians in relation to giving, they had their share of excuses for their low level of play. Read on and you'll see those excuses up close and personal:

<sup>12</sup> For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what *a person* has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup> For *this* is not for the ease of others *and* for your affliction, but by way of equality— <sup>14</sup> at this present time your abundance *being a supply* for their need, so that their abundance also may become *a supply* for your need, that there may be equality; <sup>15</sup> as it is written, "HE WHO *gathered* MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO *gathered* LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

What were some of their excuses for their lackluster performance at the plate?

From verse 12, the *Carnal Corinthians* stated, to re-phrase, "Look, Paul, we are ready to give but we just don't have enough yet to give. When we have more, then we'll give." Or, they might have been saying here, "Look, Coach, we are not able to give like others, therefore we are not going to give." Right. Like these are good excuses. God is not concerned with the amount given but with the spirit of the giving. You excuse makers might need to hear that one more time. Once again, remember the *Wonderful Widow*. Her amount given was not as significant as the self-less, sacrificial spirit which accompanied the gift.

From verses 13 through 14, the *Carnal Corinthians* were thinking something like, "Look, Coach, if we give to the *Jerusalem Red Sox* like the *Macedonian Mudville Nine*, then we'll be in a bad financial standing ourselves. How can that be logical? Therefore, we need to hold back." Paul's response took the legs out of this clever excuse not to give by arguing for simply equality in the body of Christ. He wasn't telling them to give up all of their finances to this need, but he was challenging them to give enough so that needs would be met and equality could be felt in the Church at large. Translated, everyone should play their part in helping when major needs face the Church, be it the Church, universal or local. Paul clenches his argument by looking at how God provided manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. He gave equally to them to make sure their needs were collectively met (Exodus 16:16-18). Believers on God's team should do no less. Everyone should step up to the plate and contribute to the team, especially when there is a financial need.

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<sup>2</sup>www.brainyquote.com

On Sunday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, you will be given the opportunity to give a gift to our building fund. I trust that as you consider what God would have you do, you will keep the players in mind we've studied so far.

- The *Wonderful Widow* teaches us the need to give quietly and radically.
- The *Macedonian Mudville Nine* teach us the importance of giving liberally and generously to God with a joyous spirit no matter what our financial picture looks like.
- The *Carnal Corinthians* teach us, well, they teach us a lot, don't they? If anything, they teach us that we, who are financially blessed like they were, need to give with both eyes fixed firmly on the Savior who showed us what real giving is all about.

Years ago an old white-haired couple walked into my office with a checkbook. Like the widow, they gave quietly and radically. Like the Macedonians they gave liberally and generously. Like the Corinthians they were people of means; however, unlike the Corinthians, they used those monetary means to touch countless lives for eternity.

Sam and Lucille. I will never forget you. I just hope that I can play ball like you played to some degree. More than that, I hope I, as a coach, can motivate others to put on your cleats and hit like you hit. I have a hunch there are a few Sam and Lucilles among us who are just waiting to **GET IN THE GAME** when the announcer says **BATTER UP!**