



Summer Lovin' Devotions

Week Two

June 18-24, 2017



Baseball

As you begin each day: Take some deep breaths and acknowledge that you are in God's presence. As you read, pay attention not just with your mind, but also with your heart. Are there words or phrases that stick out to you? If yes, take time to consider them. Carry the words with you throughout the day and let God continue to work with you on what has been brought to your attention. If you get distracted as you read, that is okay. Use the distractions as a reminder to thank God for those happy distractions and as a reminder to give to God those troubling distractions.

All scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Day 1: Wait til Next Year

We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through [our Lord Jesus Christ], and we boast in the hope of God's glory. But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

–Romans 5:2-5

“Wait til Next Year” is one of the most common sayings in baseball. At the end of the season, only one team in the major leagues is World Series Champion. If it's not your team, there is a time of sadness, but fairly quickly, fall turns to winter and winter turns to spring and with it, sadness turns to hope! Likewise, in each of our lives we have times of trouble that produce sadness. Psalm 30:5 says, *Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.* Sadness won't last forever; joy will come. And, how we wish that verse was a promise to have 24-hour turn around for grief! In reality, sometimes hope is slow in coming. When hope is described as a light at the end of the tunnel, we acknowledge that at times the tunnel is so long that no light can be seen. In these times, we need hope of hope. Perhaps, during times of trouble, there is comfort in the tested truth that Romans teaches: problems produce endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, indicating that God bends problems for good. During great troubles though, the best comfort of all is from the Comforter, as Deuteronomy 31:6 states, *the Lord your God goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.* In what ways and during what times have you experienced hope during? How can you be a presence of hope for someone who is going through trouble today?

Prayer: Our Hope, we thank you for your promise to be with us at all times. You never leave us or forsake us.

Encourage us to look for your presence in our lives today and show us how to be your presence in the lives of your children today. Amen.

Day 2: Don't Always Keep Your Eye on the Ball

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

–1 Samuel 16:7

From the beginning we teach little ball players to keep their eyes on the ball. It is hard to hit a ball without looking at it. It's hard to catch a ball without looking at it too. When watching a game, if you want to see an out, a great catch, or a long-ball going "just foul", you have to keep your eye on the ball. But, if you want to really take in a game, take your eyes off the ball. Watch the rhythmic movement of fielders as the pitcher gets ready to throw, watch as they move into position to cut-off or back-up a throw after a fly ball. Watch defenses move from one position to another. See the movement of the entire infield, and the outfielders too, as a batter squares to bunt. You have to keep your eye away from the ball to see all of these things. God teaches us the wisdom of doing likewise. We need to adjust our perspectives from time to time, look away from the action and listen apart from the noise. Where are there hurting people among us? Where is there goodness that isn't being noticed? What voices aren't being heard? What's going on underneath the things that often occupy your attention? How can you adjust what you're look at or listening to?

Prayer: God, you are all-seeing, all-hearing, and all-knowing. Give us ears to hear the voices that are silenced by the din of noise all around. Give us eyes to notice the persistent goodness you are producing in the places we often miss. Use our hands and feet and voices to be your witnesses in your world. Amen.

Day 3: Don't Just Sit in the Dugout

The father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. –Luke 15:22-28

It's inspiring to see an entire team empty the dugout when a player hits a home run. They congregate at home plate and celebrate with the freedom of children. Have you ever noticed that sometimes a player stays behind in the dugout? Maybe the player is tired, maybe jealous, maybe he could have hit that pitch further, maybe the hitter has a low batting average and the guy in the dugout doesn't want to celebrate what's mediocre, or maybe he realizes their team is still trailing on the scoreboard. For whatever reason, the one who stays in the dugout is missing out. The faithful brother in Luke 15 missed out too. He didn't want to come in to celebrate his brother's return. He was angry because he'd been faithful to his father and no one was celebrating him. On paper, the brother who had stayed was probably a lot better than the brother who returned. But their father pointed out that getting the brother home was reason to celebrate. Celebrating together builds comradery – it's good to celebrate together. Who have you celebrated with recently? What have you celebrated? What things are you reluctant to celebrate?

Prayer: Wow God, you have given us bodies made for celebration: we can smile and laugh and clap and even whoop and yell and jump. Help us align our celebrations

with your celebrations. Give us new reasons to celebrate and remind us again of those things you've already provided that are worthy of celebration. Get us out of the dugout and into your party. Amen.

Day 4: Baseball via Radio Broadcasts

Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Then Philip began to speak... he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. -Acts 8:27-31,35-38

Generally, we think of the athletes when we talk about the gifted people in baseball. And they are, but another group of gifted people are the sports broadcasters, especially those in radio. With their voices, radio announcers describe a game in such detail that listeners can build an image of the game in their minds. "The Cubs in their block-letter alternate jerseys, gray shirts and long gray pants, both with blue trim, but today wearing a reversed color caps, in red rather than blue..." Beloved announcers are masters at interpreting the game for people who want to hear. In Acts, there was a master interpreter named Philip. He was sent by the Spirit to an Ethiopian who really wanted to hear about ...something, someone, he didn't know who. Philip sat beside him and guided his reading, letting him hear what God was doing. And when the eunuch heard and

understood, he believed and was baptized. Think back over the past day or so, who have you listened to recently? How did what they said affect you? Who does God use to interpret what God is doing and saying in your life? With whom do you share what God is doing?

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for the imagination you've put within us to be able to hear words and create pictures in our minds. Thank you for the ability to learn spiritual truths with our minds and hearts. Thank you for those who tell us the stories of Jesus. Give us voices to speak for you. Amen.

Day 5: No Perfect Game

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

—Romans 12:14-21

To date, no team in Major League Baseball has had a perfect season. In fact, no team has won more than 76.3% of their games. A team can have a "winning season" if they win just 51% of games. Similarly, there is no perfect batting average. Every batter strikes out. In fact, even the players with the best batting averages hit less than 40% of their at-bats. In school, another name for 51% and 40% is F. In life, as in baseball, we have a lot of room for growth. Back in 1947, baseball began to be reintegrated racially with the

Dodgers playing Jackie Robinson. That same year Larry Doby, also an African American player, joined Cleveland. African American players faced fierce racism, but often rose above it. Doby explained, "I was never bitter because I believed in the man upstairs. I continue to do my best. If I was bitter I'd only be hurting me." He was a tremendous example of living the instructions in Romans 12. When we take an honest look around at our culture and even into our own hearts, we will find that we still have a long way to go toward living this passage. There still exists a large gap in education between races, and even when education levels are the same, African Americans have significantly less income and less wealth than Whites.¹ Working toward peace and equality can seem as daunting as attempting a career .400 batting average, but as we see in Romans 12 above, it's a work to which we are called. Where do you notice inequality? How do you recognize injustice? In what relationships are you living in peace? Which relationships do you avoid or where do you have conflict? How is God calling you to live in peace?

Prayer: God of peace, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ you have shown us the great effort that peace requires. Forgive us for times when we have lived our tidy lives away from the chaos that injustice causes. Cause us to notice the areas in our hearts, neighborhoods, and world where peace is not being found. Give us wisdom and courage to follow you in obedience wherever you lead.

Day 6: Is Jesus Your Mascot?

Jesus said to everyone, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will save them. What advantage do people have if they gain the whole world for themselves yet perish or lose their lives?"

—Luke 9:23-25, Common English Bible

Baseball is full of loveable mascots. Clark is the lovable little bear for the Chicago Cubs, Fredbird for the Cardinals, and Mr. Shucks for the Cedar Rapids Kernels, to name a few. Mascots provide a fun diversion from the game as well as a face for fans of the team. They're good for laughs, hugs, and high-fives. They make fans feel good. Sometimes, that's how we approach Jesus too. We want Jesus to make us feel good. We like to talk about how much God loves us – and it's true, God does love us! We celebrate God's good gifts to us – and we should! We may even be tempted to sound like the Pharisee in Luke 18 giving thanks to God for how good we are. And it's also common to forget that following Jesus has some painful requirements. Jesus says we must take up our cross daily to follow him. That's not something Fredbird is likely to say. Jesus calls us to come follow more closely, where we consider more than just love and gifts, where we experience pain and suffering in real-life honesty. When we take up our cross and follow Jesus we discover deeper love and gifts than a mascot could ever provide. Who have you seen take up their cross for Jesus? How do you treat Jesus like a mascot? When have you experienced pain and suffering for Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Jesus, your love and gifts are real and abundant, but you cannot be reduced to a happy-go-lucky mascot. You lived and died and live again showing us the way to real life. By your spirit, empower us to follow your example today, and give us courage to do it again tomorrow and for all the tomorrows of our life. Amen.

¹ <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/1-demographic-trends-and-economic-well-being/>