



"Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see."

—Corrie ten Boom

**01-Jun-07**

## **A Lesson from the Diamond**

Please indulge me a moment as I boast about my eight-year-old son, Jarod. Thursday evening, in his last baseball game of the season, he hit a two-out, inside-the-park grand-slam homerun, scoring what would become the winning run of the only game his team has won all season. Jarod's team just barely won the game, as the opposing team scored five runs in its half of the next inning. The final score was 13-12. Afterward, his elated coach gave him the game ball.

This was Jarod's first year of playing organized baseball. For Sabbath-keepers, finding a nearby league that does not play most of its games on Friday nights and Saturdays is a chore. We are fortunate that a local community, just a few miles from the church office in Fort Mill, runs such a league. So, Jarod and his cousin, Zachary Onisick, 7, were signed up in the hope that they would be put on the same team.

No such luck. Zachary was chosen to play on the black-and-tan team sponsored by Pineville Rehabilitation, while Jarod was picked by the red-

and-white team, whose shirts displayed the cute but not very athletic moniker, Punkin's Awards. However, both Jarod and Zachary both wore the number 5 on their jerseys. Joe DiMaggio would be proud.

Punkin's Awards was behind the eight-ball from the beginning. Evidently, either the league was late in choosing a coach for the team, or the coach himself was tardy in contacting the boys on his roster, because the team lost a few days or a week to the other teams in terms of practice time. As the first practices showed, this team would need a great deal of work to hone it into a winner. Only a handful of the boys could throw well (half of one practice consisted of the boys throwing ball after ball into a fence), and only one or two of them could be counted on to stop any of the balls hit in their general direction. As for hitting, well, it looked as if it would be a long season.

Jarod, if I may say so, had the most natural swing from the beginning, and proved to be among the most consistent hitters on the team, eventually being chosen to fill the important leadoff slot. He is a natural athlete with good hand-eye coordination and a desire to hustle and play well. When members of the local congregation played softball during the summer months, Jarod had participated as much as he could, especially on the offensive side of things, and those experiences helped him immensely. Though lacking baseball experience, he brought with him a good feel for the game, so he was not at all far behind the other boys who already had a few years of tee-ball and coach-pitch baseball under their belts.

Thursday's game against Zachary's team, Pineville Rehab, started out slowly. First, the tan-shirted boys put a few runs on the scoreboard, and the Punkins scratched out a couple of runs of their own. Jarod and Zachary both struck out, helping neither cause with their bats. And then the bottom half of the fourth inning occurred. Ironically, Jarod led off the inning by striking out a second time, which was quite unusual for him. Then, like a switch had been flipped somewhere, his teammates began to get hit after hit—seven straight, scoring four runs and loading the bases for the number-nine hitter in the lineup. He struck out on three pitches for the second out.

While Jarod stood on deck, taking a few practice swings, I told him, "Forget about all those things I told you before. Just go up there and smack the ball." As he walked to the plate, it must have passed through the minds of the other

team's coaches, if they remembered, that Jarod had struck out twice before and that this already long inning would finally be over with this batter. Jarod stepped into the batter's box and did his normal dance as he settled in, seemingly unaware of the pressure of the situation—perhaps he was not aware.

I do not recall if it was the first pitch that he hit or the second, but when he hit it, there was no doubt it was his best hit of the season. It was a short line drive that skipped past the shortstop and into left-center field. Jarod charged off for first base as the crowd erupted in cheers—most of them yelling, "Run!" or "Go!" And that is what all the boys did, all the way around the diamond. Jarod had hit an inside-the-park grand-slam homerun—his first homerun and first extra-base hit.

As he ran back to the dugout, excited but hardly realizing what he had done, Jarod was hoisted into the air by his coach, and his teammates gave him high-fives all around. He sat on the bench, panting from the long run around the bases and grinning with the thrill of it all. It was the perfect way for him to end the season. It will keep him coming back.

However, the game was not over yet. Zachary's team came up in the top of the next inning, exploding for five runs—in which Zachary himself singled and scored—to come within one run of tying the score. For the parents of the Punkin's Awards players, it was agonizing to watch the lead shrink nearly to nothing, which made the eventual win all the more gratifying. That sort of game keeps the parents coming back too.

All of this is just a nice story, though, if no lesson can be learned from it. One pops out immediately: It is possible to over-coach a player. In my pre-game instructions to Jarod, I had told him several things that he needed to do to "correct" his swing mechanics: He was not stepping toward the pitcher, he needed to rotate his hips through the swing, he should be moving his weight from his "back" foot to his "front" foot, etc. I was forgetting that he already had a good swing, had developed his hand-eye coordination, and could make contact with the ball more often than not. "He is eight years old!" I scolded myself later. "Just let him have fun!"

We all have high expectations of others, especially parents of their children. But children, students—and disciples—have to be brought along at a pace that they can handle. First-graders are not ready for calculus quite yet, just as Jarod is not old enough to understand fully and to apply consistently the intricacies of swinging a baseball bat. Besides, in the grand scheme of things, such a skill is not that important. Right now, "swing hard" and "put the bat on the ball" are really all he needs to remember; his natural athleticism will fill in the gaps.

Obviously, this applies spiritually too. We can have all knowledge about a certain virtue or activity, but depending on our spiritual maturity, we may not be able to put it into practice except on a limited level. We may not be quite ready for the big leagues, as it were. We still need more practice. Thank [God](#) that He is not only aware of this principle, but brings us along in spiritual understanding and practice over an extended time according to our own aptitudes and resolve ([II Peter 3:9](#), 15, 18). And every once in a while, we probably surprise and delight Him—and ourselves—by hitting a grand slam.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [God's Workmanship \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Good works are something that take place after the process of salvation has begun. Good works are the effects of God sending forth His Spirit and deliverance, but the works are not the cause of our deliverance. God's creative effort did not end with the physical creation or our election, but God continues to work, giving us the motivation and the power to do His will (Philippians 2:13) to the end that we might exemplify His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10)- a new spiritual creation shaped and patterned after God's image, having the ethical and moral character of God.

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by Charles Whitaker

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