

The God Life Part 4: "Keeping My Eye On The Ball" 04.29.12

Scripture: [Luke 8:11-15](#) / [2 Peter 1:6b](#) NIV

Intro: Today I want to talk to you about perseverance. The ability to "stay with it" no matter what. At the end of his life - facing execution for his faith - Peter writes:

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith ... perseverance." 2 Peter 1:5-6 NIV

For Peter this perseverance meant not giving up his faith in Christ despite the horrible means of his coming execution. For many generations of Christ-followers, perseverance has meant sticking with the Christian faith despite suffering.

For most of us in 21st century America, however, suffering for our faith is not something we will experience a lot. That's good news. Yet, we must still persevere. The enemy of our faith - for most of us - is not the abundance of difficulty. Rather the lack of it. We are more likely to give up our faith because we become distracted. For us the key to growing our Christian faith is to **keep our eye on the ball**. The first thing a baseball player learns when he comes to bat is to keep his eye on the ball. He must be able to block out everything else in his mind and in a split second be able to see where the ball is going. Will it be a strike? A ball? If he swings his bat, will he make contact? Geoff Moore and the Distance recorded Home Run back in 1995. Listen to this segment.

Play Audio: "HomeRun01.mp3" [0:47]

Jesus gave us the ultimate story of keeping our eyes on the ball. We know it as "The Sower and the Seeds." This evening we find Jesus' story in Luke 8:11-15. Since it's springtime and baseball season, we're going to place the story into baseball language. If we want to persevere as a Christ-follower - which for today would mean that we want to get home plate - there are 4 bases we have to cross.

4 Bases of Perseverance

1st Base: [GOOD INTENTIONS](#).

Starting anything new is difficult. How many times have we never gotten beyond the initiative to start a new diet or exercise routine or anything else that we think might be good for us. This is the base of good intentions - the well-meaning, someday I'll get around to it base... but the right time never comes. This is also true of Christianity. **Jesus tells us:**

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved." Luke 8:11-12 NIV

The key to being a Christian is not a creed we affirm or a church that we join. The key is being able to hear God speak to us through the Spirit of Christ, God's one and only Son. The *primary* way we hear God is through the Bible, which is why we call it the Word of God. For those who never go beyond first base, something happens between the hearing and the receiving. It never gets planted within our hearts. God's Word is surface only, easily forgotten by us and stolen by the devil.

2nd Base: FALSE STARTS

Sometimes we hear God's Word AND receive God's Word. But we never seem to get beyond the starting gate. We get started. Then we quit for awhile. Then something draws us back. We start over again. Our Christianity seems like one false start after another. **Jesus tells us why:**

"Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." Luke 8:13 NIV

There is no such thing as a Christian faith without times of testing. Temptations. Disappointments. Dry spells. Discouragement. Many look to the Christian faith as the means of handling tough times. Often, however, tough times are the means of discovering true Christian faith.

The difference between the Christian who falls away during times of testing and the Christian who sticks with it - who perseveres - is this idea of having no root. In the plant world the strong and deep roots anchor and nourish the plant through the storms and through the drought. The disciplines of prayer, fasting, Bible study, tithing, fellowship with other believers - these are the roots that keep us going beyond the initial happy beginning of our new commitment to Christ.

3rd Base: SMOTHERING DIVERSIONS

Third base can be tricky. Often baseball players can get to home base from 2nd base. They are considered "runners in a scoring position."

Still, the runner must make it to 3rd before he can come home.

Christians also can become distracted. They've made their commitment. Their faith has taken root. Yet still they may not grow to become the man or woman God wants them to become. **Jesus tells us how:**

"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." Luke 8:13 NIV

"As they go on their way" should make us stand up and take notice. This is the man or woman committed, rooted in Christ on his way to maturity. Yet he doesn't make it. Why? Because he is choked off. He is smothered. He is suffocated. He stops breathing in God's Word because of #1) worries; #2) riches; and #3) pleasures. Worries choke us when we dwell upon our problems rather than pray upon them. We cannot worry and pray simultaneously. Riches choke us when we become dependent upon our finances rather than upon the God Who provided our finances. Pleasures chokes us off when we pursue pleasures more than God.

The irony of the wording from Jesus is that we are "choked" without putting up a struggle. If anyone came and put a pillow on your mouth so that you could not breathe, you would do everything you could to get another breath. Worries, riches and pleasures, however, are incredibly dangerous to us - like a depressant to our spiritual nervous system.

Home Base: PERSEVERING GROWTH

Baseball players know the end game is to get the runner home. How do we get to home base as a Christ-follower? **Jesus tells us our objective:**

"But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."
Luke 8:13 NIV

The Christ-follower who has heard it, retained it, persevered through times of testing and life's diversions. This is what home plate means. Also notice that the result of this is to "produce a crop." The inevitable result of our growth in Christ will be that others will be influenced toward the God-life as well. People will see you staying with it, persevering. They will want what you have. It's not a matter of you ever "selling" anything. Your life will speak even more loudly than your words!

The Simple Conclusion: Where is your heart at? Your heart is the soil of Jesus' parable. Have you had good intentions, but never really got started? Is your Christian life defined more by the false starts than the maturing finish? Has your faith been choked off by worries, riches and pleasures? Listen for the Word of God. Retain it. Mature in it. *That's the ending I've usually heard from the sermons on the Sower and the Seeds.*

The Complex - But More Real - Conclusion: *Soil changes.* Sometimes it's moist and ready to receive. Sometimes it's hard and parched. Sometimes it's great growth material. Sometimes it's a killing zone. Not only does soil change, but your heart changes. You may have been more receptive in the past than you are now. Or your yesteryear may have been a closed door to God's gentle voice, but now you're ready to hear.

Important Lesson: Yesterday's response to God isn't as important as today's response. Today is what matters. Each day, it's about today's response. You can't change yesterday. You haven't yet lived tomorrow. How are you responding to the word of God NOW?

Baseball Illustration. The farmer doesn't only plant one crop in a lifetime. Each spring he's out doing it again. The baseball player doesn't just get up to bat once and then quit. He usually has 3-4 or more "at bats" in a game. Then there's the next game and the next - 162 games in a season... that's 500 - 700 "at bats" every year! Even the ML Baseball player never outgrows *having to keep his eye on the ball!*

When you hear this parable - and I hope you hear it and read it often - don't just think in terms of you going *once* around the bases. The soil of our hearts change over time. Our lives change. We encounter new challenges, new worries, and new diversions. We must constantly be doing a self-evaluation of the "state of our hearts."

Like the Simple Conclusion, I want you to ask yourself: "What is the state of my heart today? Am I defined today as mere good intentions? Am I only a series of false starts? Is my relationship with God being choked off? The Complex - but Real - Conclusion goes one more step.

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What am I doing now so that I may persevere in my Christian faith?

What am I doing to keep the soil of my heart moist and ready?

What am I doing to keep my eye on the ball?

Christianity is a faith of perseverance. It's not a one-time decision, check that box, fill in that card, join-up kind of faith. It's a persevering faith - an every day decision, an ongoing sacrifice, a continuing surrender, and a recommitment to make it to home plate with Jesus every single day. **Or in the words and music of Geoff Moore and the Distance...**

Play Audio: "HomeRun02.mp3" [0:59] Pray.