

Get In The Game

Drills For Disciples: Part 9
Faith, Finances & the Future

Written By
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Prior to a game against Palo Verde High School near the Arizona border, our coach told us that scouts from various pro teams would be taking notes on our play as they looked for new players for their farm programs. While sitting in the bench on the first base line prior to the game, we quickly identified the men from the A's and the Angel's ball teams. The insignia on their sport shirts, along with the logos on their hats, and scoresheets on their laps were a dead giveaway. Believe me, we all felt the pressure to perform well that day because your play could possibly change your life radically in the future. We also felt the pressure from this being our first game broadcast on a local radio program.

We also felt the pressure of the opposing pitcher. We knew it would be a tough game to do well in because he had a good fastball, coupled with a wicked knuckleball, one which seemed to defy gravity as it floated erratically toward the plate. Stepping up the plate, I knew a lot road on this particular game. I had to hit well. I had to jump on one of those knuckle balls if I wanted to improve my chances at possibly making a double or triple A team.

Well into the count, I drilled a line drive up the middle toward center. I rounded first and headed into second with a stand up double. "Yeah," I thought to myself. "That's exactly what those pro scouts needed to see. This hit has got to help me get a break." Before I tell you what happened next, let me remind you that my team number was 22. While standing on the bag, excited about my performance, I heard the announcer say over the PA, "Wow, that was a great hit by number 22, James Lavender."

“What?” I yelled. “James Lavender is not number 22. Number 22 is Marty Baker.” I could tell by the noise generated by the crowd the scouts didn’t seem to hear my cry from second. I did see them writing on their scorecard binders, but I’m sure they were writing James’ name down, not mine. Ugh. Did those scouts ever talk to me? Nope. Believe me, I still give James grief on that particular call. He can take it because we’ve known each other since we were about six years old in Pee Wee baseball.

Spiritually, what’s the message in this? A couple of motifs pop out to me.

One, Jesus, our Team Owner, Coach, and former player, will never forget how you’ve played in His name. He’ll never confuse your number with another player’s. He’ll never get confused about how well you played in a particular game. Two, how you play does, in fact, have a bearing on your future. No, I’m not talking about whether you make it to the heavenly club house or not. That’s a given for all players on His team because He has promised us that much.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11).

Honestly, it doesn’t get any clearer than this. Belief in Christ as the Savior doesn’t just place you on His team; it assures you of a place in the club house for all eternity.

Conversely, what is often overlooked, downplayed, or misunderstood by players is how we play in the here and now, how we use all of the resources the Team Owner has entrusted to us will radically impact for all eternity. We tend to think, “Yeah, I’m going to heaven with all these other players and that’s going to be great.” This is true. Just standing in heaven, breathing in its perfect air, enjoying its breathtaking beauty, basking in the warm light generated by the God holy persona, and walking down its golden yet translucent streets (Revelation 22:1-5), will be jaw-dropping. However, this is not the whole story as revealed by the Team Owner’s teaching on subject, meshed with the teaching of other great and inspired players like Paul, Peter, and so forth. Our play here does impact our positioning there. I know that statement might make some a little comfortable, but it’s validated all over the place in the Word. Consider, for instance, Christ’s words in the Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal ... (Matthew 6).

The Greek negative (Μη) followed by the present tense imperative, *thesaurizete* (θησαυρίζετε) forbids an action in progress. Hence we can grammatically translate the sentence this way: “Stop stockpiling treasures on earth.” Our word thesaurus, which means a treasury of words, is derived from this ancient word. Applying this to Christ’s teaching, He is saying we, as players, shouldn’t have so many stored financial resources we’ll never be able to use them in a lifetime. Additionally, He’s saying this type of financial stockpile is a sub-par investment because it’s focused on perishable products. On the contrary, He commands us to be perpetually focused (which is denoted by the present tense verb, *θησαυρίζετε*) on stockpiling heavenly treasure which is, by definition, eternal and far superior.

Logically, it follows that since Jesus, the Team Owner, counsels His players to play well by investing *now* in the *then* of the eternal kingdom, we can safely conclude that the amount of spiritual treasures former players will enjoy will vary. Some will make large heavenly

investments; some will make modest ones, while others will have little to show for how they sought to advance His kingdom while on earth. And just what those heavenly treasures are remains a mystery to us, but since they will be from the Lord they can be nothing short of jaw-dropping.

We are playing on God's team while we're on this ol' earth; however, how we play does, in fact, echo in eternity. How we play, how we invest the resources God has entrusted to us in the short span of an earthly lifetime will impact us in the timeless halls of heaven. If you have never thought about this as a player, you need to because it can lead to better, wiser, more effective play. If you've known it but brushed it off because you're busy and pre-occupied with earthly matters, you need to reconsider for your negligence will negatively impact your game. As your earthly coach on this particular spiritual franchise called BCC, I want you to enjoy the moment you stand before the Team Owner because you played well. To get you to that point I know I must point you to a key spiritual premise none of us should ever forget as we play:

A Maturing Player Plays With The Future In Mind

No. I'm not talking about an earthly future but a heavenly one. As I've said, the Scriptures remind us all over the place that we will give account for how we've played on this planet for the Team Owner. I know sermons are supposed to have two or three supportive points, but for our purposes today and for the sake of time, I merely want to develop this all-important lone point because we so easily forget it. In our next study, we shall focus on a second pivotal, life-changing point, but right now I merely want to get this following concept firmly embedded in your spiritual baseball brains. A maturing player plays with the future in mind ...

Because He Anticipates The Divine Review

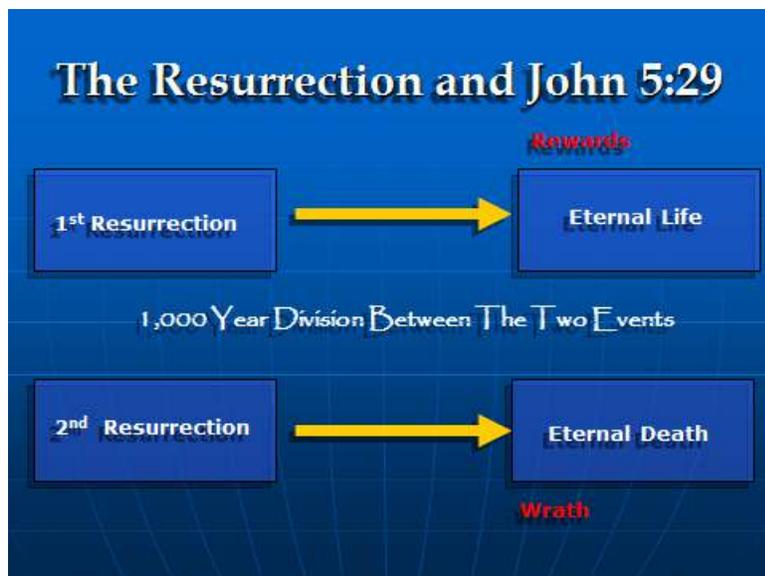
Many scriptures, from both testaments, caution us of the coming day when we give account for our earthly performance:

¹³The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. ¹⁴For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12).

Pretty clear, wouldn't you say? Solomon's wrap-up counsel about how wise people should live is sobering. They realize that every facet of their lives, from how they love their mates to what goes on in the theater of their minds will be weighed and judged by God for its worth. This makes total sense. How could the God who created us, who saved us and placed us on His team, not evaluate our performance as players? How could He not hold us accountable? The fact is ... He will one day. One day everything you said, why you said it, what you thought and why you thought it, what you invested in and why you invested in it, what you owned and why you owned it, what you said to someone and why you said it will be put on divine display to ascertain it's value on a spiritual plane. How will this occur? Dr. Wilbur Penfield, a former director of the Montreal Neurological Institute gives an idea:

Your brain contains a permanent record of your past that is like a single continuous strip of moving film, complete with sound track. The film library records your whole waking life from childhood on. You can live

again those scenes form your past, one at a time, when a surgeon places a gentle electrical current and applies it to a certain point on the temporal cortex of your brain. As you relive the scenes from your past, you feel exactly the same emotions you did during the original experience.¹



The good doctor merely shows how easily God can evaluate us. Is this not sobering and highly motivational, and it's not just relegated to the yellowed pages of the Old Testament.

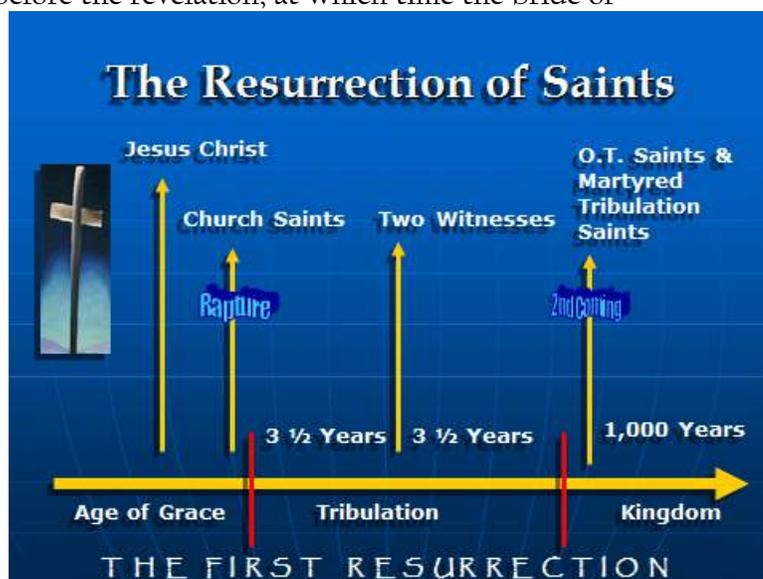
The New Testament clearly supports the point that believers will be judged for their performance as team players:

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his

deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5).

Concerning the timing of this future judgment, Dr. Herman Hoyt states in his book *The End Times*:

It [this judgment] will probably begin immediately after the rapture and will continue until shortly before the revelation, at which time the bride of Christ, now having made herself ready, is joined in wedlock to the heavenly Bridegroom (Rev. 19:7-8). Since the true church is made up of only saved people, the issue at this judgment will be to examine the service of believers as displayed by their works and to reward them accordingly (1 Cor. 3:10-17; 2 Cor. 5:10).²



I couldn't agree more.

Paul sheds more light on this

¹ Quoted in Charles Swindoll's *Living On The Edge* (Guideposts: New York, 1985), 373.

² Herman Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 218.

unique judgment of believers in 1 Corinthians 3:

¹⁰According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3).

Applying this to our baseball metaphor, we can state that we, as players, must be careful how will build the team. We can play with gold, silver, and precious stones, or we can play with stones, wood, hay, and straw. We can give God our best or our second best. We can take the time, treasures, and talents He has entrusted us with and use them to advance His team, or we can use those resources to, for the most part, selfishly advance our lives. Either way, we shall all, as team mates, give account in the future to the quality, not the quantity of our team play. Those who've invested well in advancing God's kingdom, inside and outside the local church, will have much to show God on the day of his review. Those who've invested unwisely in earthly concerns will have little, or nothing to show. What will you, as a player, have to show on that day?

The Lord is going to judge every facet of our lives, and from what we know of His teaching in the parables, a big portion of that analysis will be in relation to how well we manages the financial resources He put in our care. His *Parable of the Minas* in Luke 19 is a case study:

¹²So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and *then* return. ¹³"And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Do business *with this* until I come *back*.' ¹⁴"But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' ¹⁵"When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. ¹⁶"The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' ¹⁷"And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.' ¹⁸"The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' ¹⁹"And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.' ²⁰"Another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; ²¹for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.' ²²"He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? ²³"Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' ²⁴"Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has

the ten minas.’ ²⁵“And they said to him, ‘Master, he has ten minas *already*.’
²⁶“I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

It’s pretty easy to interpret this parabolic story.

The nobleman, or Team Owner, is Jesus and He speaks about His up and coming trip to heaven. The slaves, of course, would be His followers, or His players to stay with our metaphor. Each one received a mina, or about three day’s wages. Each one was expected to invest that financial resource so it would increase the nobleman’s net worth, estate, etc. Each one would be held accountable for how well they invested their nobleman’s monies. Each would have to think of industrious ways to invest the monies entrusted to them. Each one had to live in light of the nobleman’s eventual and sudden return to settle accounts. Each one had to realize they were investing their nobleman’s resources, not their own.

Two of the players invested the nobleman’s money in ways which increased his net worth. The first player turned the one, lone mina into ten, while the second parlayed it into five. He rewarded them according to their prowess in investing wisely; however, he judged the last player for his lackluster performance. His excuses on judgment day didn’t hold water and he lost whatever reward the nobleman could have given him. Yes, there were eternal consequences for his willful disobedience in not investing the resources entrusted to him. His reward was taken and given to the man who turned one mina into ten, suggesting that this is what will happen on the real judgment day. Some will have great rewards and be given much responsibility for the heavenly team franchise, while others will lose out. True, they will still enjoy the benefits of being in the Club House; however, they will miss out on great rewards reserved for those who invest the Team Owner’s finances creatively and strategically. This is most instructive and motivational.

All of this should make you stop and ask yourself some questions:

- How will I fare on judgment day?
- Lord, am I investing the whole mina in your work or just a part of it?
- Will the Lord be pleased with how I invested the resources He left with me until He returned for me?
- More precisely, what am I doing, in the here and now, to invest His financial resources to advance His team?
- Lord, what lame, illogical, unfounded excuses am I currently holding onto like the last servant which keep me from being bold and generous in my kingdom investment?
- Lord, on my divine review day will I say, “I wish I have invested more in your kingdom,” or will I say, “I am glad I knew how to give to support kingdom causes”? Lord, can you help me close the gap between what I might say in the future and what I’m giving to you right now?
- God, do I treat you as the CFO of “my” financial holdings, or am I acting like the CFO while acting like you are merely a good financial adviser?
- Have I grown spiritually lazy in thinking that everything is equal in heaven?
- Have I lost sight of the biblical motif that how I invest *here* is integrally tied to my blessing *there*?

- If I sharpened my understanding of the future divine review day, if I truly applied that understanding to my current financial portfolio, then what would change in how I invest those monies?
- Will I be known in heaven as one who invested in heavenly, eternal commodities by how I supported God's kingdom work here, or will I be known as one who invested heavily in the earthly, temporal commodities surrounding me right now?

John Wesley (1703-1791), the father of Methodism (along with his brother Charles), was an extremely wealthy man. Translated, the Lord entrusted much to him. He was a great man of God, devoting hours each day to studying the Word of God in the original text, writing sermons, and penning books and hymns. His wealth came from all of these fine materials he published in this lifetime, and at the end of his life he had given away forty pounds of pure sterling silver, a fortune in his day and time. Where did the monies go? He invested them in the team of God because He loved the Team Owner, Jesus, and because he understood the import of parables like the one we've just touched on.

Ostensibly, we are all players in the Lord's parable about what He expects from us prior to His return and our review day. We've all been entrusted with financial resources and we are called to be good money managers with those resources. We are called to use those monies wisely to care for ourselves and our families. We are also supposed to make sure we take a good portion of those resources and invest them in the team. Sure, we are to care for the poor and downtrodden, we are to meet needs of the needy about us; however, we are also called, as we've studied to support the local team, the church, and it's quest to expand and enlarge the work of the Lord. And as we have seen in the texts before us, eternity will hold for us what we have invested there during our lives on earth.³

From what I've seen as a coach of a large local team, I've devised an investment matrix, a grid, as it were, which shows how players typically view using the financial resources God has put at their disposal. Basically, I see there are five levels or five types of ball players:

- **The Free Agent:** This team member knows what's going on at his church, and typically has a good grasp of what is offered and who is who. He has, however, not really given of himself, especially where his finances are concerned. But he is for the team because he likes what they offer.
- **The Designated Hitter:** He loves the team and steps up occasionally to hit financially when the need arises in the line-up. Typically, around six times a year he'll perform in a powerful, marked fashion before he heads back to the bench of giving obscurity.
- **The First Stringer:** This is a person is sold out so much to the Team Owner and the team, he isn't just plugged in all the time, he has a perpetual plan for giving to make sure the team isn't just solvent but positioned for maximum wins. He, therefore, invests on a consistent basis.
- **The Slugger:** His financial slugging percentage shows he has what it takes to get on base. He's the guy who gives a large proportion of the monies the Team Owner has entrusted to him to advance the team. He's the guy who really go the concept that a 10% tithe was just the floor of his giving, not the ceiling.

³ Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 109.

His play illustrates he's investing way beyond the typical 10% many players invest. Really, players of his stature are few and far between but they are always a joy to watch play the game for they propel the team to new heights.

- **The Hall of Famer:** His legacy of giving to advance the team's impact is off the charts and will live beyond his life. He's truly a one of a kind giver. His financial goals for the Team Owner aren't just lofty dreams. No, he lives to realize them before his final retirement to eternity. John Wesley was probably one of these types of ball players.

Makes you ask yourself as a team member: I wonder which name best describes my giving, my investment in the work of God, especially in and through my local team?

As team members, you all know what God has been doing around here over the last several years. We have grown spiritually in profound ways. Many lives have been changed and transformed into the likeness of Christ. God's Word has sounded forth from this place on a weekly basis in a powerful fashion, bringing life, hope, and clarity to a Christless culture. Numerous people have left the Devil's team for the Lord's team. Our baptismal tank has been quite busy as folks from all walks of life and all ages have obediently shown publically through their baptism what Christ's salvation has done for them spiritually and mystically. Mission work, both national and international has exploded in amazing ways, touching thousands life needy lives. And numerically, well, if you've had difficulty parking your car, then you know God has most certainly blessed us. Having a 300% growth rate over seven years is both a work of God and a miracle in and of itself.

All of this rich, practical theology, of course, has to be applied to the building endeavor before us. Next Sunday is when we are challenging each of you, as team members, to turn in your commitment card to the new worship/educational/and administrative buildings we need to build to accommodate the growth of this team, and to position us for future growth and societal impact. I trust you have been praying about what part of God's resources you will invest for team/kingdom expansion. In my view, this will prove to be one of the more spiritually important investment moves many of us will make in our spiritual walks. My prayer is simple: That God would move us to generously invest His monies so that we are truly prepared to give account on the divine day of accounting. We have all been providentially placed on this team, at this point in time, for, as such a time as this (Esther 4:14). What greater thing, therefore, could we do than be obedient with our resources?