

Get In The Game

Batter Up!

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

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With an adult growth rate of 281% and a children's growth rate of 236% over the last eight years, it is no wonder we are, as a team, on the leading edge of our third building program. During our first building adventure, we remodeled and expanded the stage and redecorated our worship center. With our second building endeavor, we doubled the size of our foyer, added a balcony with extra seats, added new office space for all our new hires, and constructed a children's check-in area to ease the flow of people into our great facility.

With our new building program called **GET IN THE GAME**, which we launched last year, our "franchise" is moving out to double the size of our entire footprint to accommodate our growth. When this worthy project is completed within the next two to three years, we will have a 1,200 seat worship facility, ample adult classrooms, an office area designed to house our growing staff, new and re-designed children's classrooms, a 14,000 square foot foyer, a 10,000 square foot basement for future expansion, a well-designed and highly functional kitchen, and a new youth facility in our current worship center for our burgeoning youth program. Exciting, isn't it?

In order to fund this much-needed \$16 million dollar project, we, a debt free team, launched the **GET IN THE GAME** series and fund drive last fall. Your financial response has been amazing, to say the least. So far, we have raised close to \$6 million, which includes 3.7 million in cash with 2.2 million remaining from pledges. Coupled with the funds we already have in savings, this generous giving has positioned us to move forward in a big way. Thank you for stepping up to the plate and doing your part to advance this spiritual team of Christ in northern Virginia.

A year later we have many more new team members; therefore, it is only appropriate for us to pause our play in the book of Daniel, and challenge them to financially join the rest of the team in supporting what the Spirit of God is doing here. You may, also, be an old timer, as it were, who, for whatever reasons have not yet given to this building opportunity. Additionally, you may have already given your pledge and are now in a new position to consider giving even more. To all these groups, I, then, invite you to step into the warmup box so you can get your batting rhythm and routine ready for how God desires to use your gifts of generosity at the plate.

Any player standing in this round, white-chalked ring knows the score and what they need to do as they head to the batter's box. For us, that score need is \$2 million dollars. With this financing in hand, we will comfortably be able to complete this all-important worship and educational facility to the Team Owner's glory (that would be God just in case you are lost in the baseball analogy). To get you pumped up and prepared to play hard to this end, we introduce you to our three part fall series titled **BATTER UP!**

As your coach, I know you are probably wondering, "How are we going to acquire this financial figure?" I think the answer is simple. We will flip open the pages of our playbook (the inspired Word of God), isolate key principles of what it means to give as God's player, and then at the close of the third locker room talk we'll challenge you to turn in your giving card, which will detail what the Lord has laid upon your mind and heart to do for your team regarding the new stadium. Right now you have that card in your bulletin. Over the next three weeks I'd counsel you to be talking to the Team Owner, asking Him for guidance about what He wants you to do. If you ask Him, He will answer.

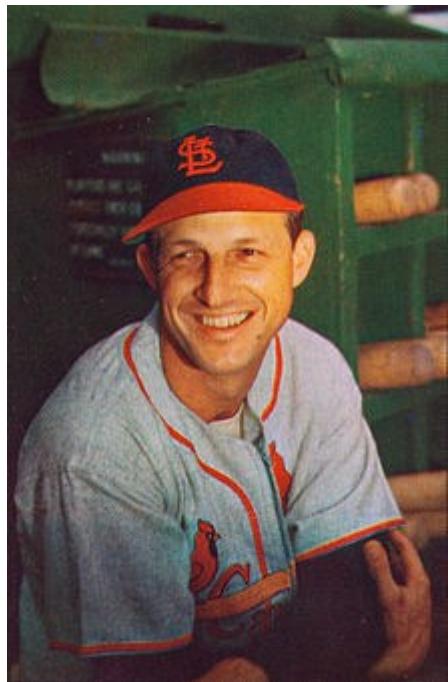
Today, I direct you to analyze some play tapes of a female player from the first century A.D. team of Jesus Christ. Study her well, learn from her technique, and resolve before you leave this room that you want your game to start resembling her game.

Her name? We don't know it. God has kept her anonymous.

We do, however,

know a moniker the Spirit of God gave her as a player. If you don't play ball, this nicknaming is, well, just part of the game. They called Hank Aaron, *Hammerin' Hank*. Walter Alston bore the title *Smokey*, while Don Drysdale answered to *Big D*, and Leo Durocher smiled when they called him *Lippy*.

In God's play book the unknown female player of all players could easily be called the *Wonderful Widow*. We encounter her historical story neatly tucked away toward the end of the book of Mark in chapter 12, verses



41 through 44. Yeah, I know, you've heard her story before. What counts, however, is not that you know about her but that you emulate her, at least to some degree as you move from the warm up box to the batter's box. As a teen baseball fanatic, I had heard of "Stan the Man" Musial, who hadn't? With a career batting average of .331, his stats speak for themselves.

- National League record for career hits: 3,630,
- Runs batted: 1,951
- Games played: 3,026
- At bats: 10,972
- Runs scored: 1,949
- Doubles: 725
- Homeruns: 475

Now you know why they called him "Stan the Man."

To improve my batting average, my father purchased Stan's 78 record (yes, a record . . . this was just after the invention of TV. ☺), and I listened to it carefully in order to copy his powerful technique. Such should be the same approach with the *Wonderful Widow* from the 30 A.D. team.

From this short video clip of the *Wonderful Widow* in action, we can summarize her strategy at the plate with this memorable and highly practical statement:

Sacrificial Generosity Is The Rule For Hard Hitters (Mark 12:41-44)

To maximize our understanding of just how she played, so we can be positioned to put on her cleats and play in a similar fashion, I'd first direct you to the written transcript from a game she played in at the Temple in Jerusalem.

⁴¹ And He sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. ⁴³ Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on" (Mark 12).

Wow! What a player. Now you know why she is known as the *Wonderful Widow*. Breaking down her amazing play on this particular day, we can easily isolate six batting principles we'd do well to utilize as we prepare to step into the batter's box in our own game.

Before we tap into this power hitting tips, I need to recreate the day in which this game occurred. With 2,000 years already passed, some of the finer details of what occurred might be a bit fuzzy, so in order to appreciate what the *Wonderful Widow* did we must remember the events which transpired when she heard the Spirit say to her, Batter Up!

The setting for this game day was the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. The date? 33 A.D., or the last week of Christ's life before He was crucified on Passover, or Friday. From what we

know from the context of Mark, coupled with the other gospels, Jesus debated with Team Pharisee and Team Sadducee. They wanted to minimize His play so they could hold spiritual power over the crowds in the stands. With verses 38 through 40 of Mark 12, Jesus hit a line drive right at their teams by exposing their pious, self-righteous, phony spiritual method of play. Everything they did for God's so-called team was designed to draw strict attention to themselves, and to line their greedy pockets with more and more financial funds.



After this heated play, where Jesus put these tenuous teams on notice, Mark, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reminds us of what happened next. Jesus walked with the disciples over to the Court of the Women, a large area located just east of the Nicanor gate, which led to the Temple precincts proper. This area was

also called the Treasury because thirteen wooden boxes with trumpet shaped devices for collecting various tithes rested around the perimeter. While seated here, Jesus watched the *Wonderful Widow* come out of nowhere. Quietly she dug her steel cleats into the fresh dirt of the Temple batter box and she swung away. This is where the story gets good because this is where we are given principles of powerful play which transcend time. Here they are. Listen. Learn. Apply.

Sacrificially Generous Players Know The Team Owner Is Watching

Good coaches and team owners watch and study their players so they can see how well they are playing, and to also isolate areas for improvement. Jesus was no exception from what the historical play book tells us:

⁴¹ And He sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

The opening coordinating conjunction “and” (*Kai*) serves to link this passage with the previous one. There He talked about how phony spiritual people don’t have a clue about humble and private giving to God, nor do they get what sacrificial generosity is all about either. They love to have the appearance of a great, magnanimous giver to God, but it’s really all just smoke and mirrors to Him. In the episode before us He will demonstrate how a real, effective player plays. Further, the coordinating conjunction appears not just in verse 41, but in verses 38, 39, 42, and 43. This is called polysyndeton and it is used for several purposes. One, to knit the story together

to a certain degree. Two, to cause us to pause and consider what is said as we head to the emphatic climax, which we do reach with Christ's analysis in verses 43 through 44.¹

I find this opening narrative most interesting as a batter on God's team. He purposefully sat down in the treasury area and started observing people giving. You might need to read that again . . . this time more slowly. The Greek verb for he "began observing" is *etheorei* (ἐθεωρεῖ), which is an imperfect indicative. Daniel Wallace informs us in his *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, we can justifiably classify this as the customary use of the imperfect.² Ostensibly, this means this is what Jesus customarily did in public, especially in the Temple area. He would watch and study people, looking for spiritual lessons and applications. Interesting, isn't it? Jesus was a people watcher.

He must have sat there for some time because the text says He watched how the rich people gave versus how the poor widow gave. They stood for quite some time dropping their coinage into the offering boxes. You can just imagine how noisy it was as their coins continued to fall and clank against other coins in the tithe box. Further, He must have been close because He could actually see what they gave.

What do we learn from this? He cares about our giving and He is well aware of how much we give (or don't give) and, more importantly, why we give. This is most interesting. Of all the verses in the playbook about faith and prayer, there are 2,350 about money . . . or twice as many.³ Further, Jesus taught more about money than He did about heaven and hell combined. Why? Because He knew it would be a potential problem for us if we wanted to follow hard after Him. Also, He wanted to make sure we understood that He would use our response to monies as a standard, to some degree, of measurement in spiritual maturity. No wonder, then, He watched then and He watches now. One day we will all have to give account for how well we used the monies He entrusted to us for the advance of His kingdom.

The Wonderful Widow might have stealthily slipped up to a particular tithe box and quietly deposited her meager offering with no fanfare or notice, but one thing was sure. Jesus noticed her method of play. The correlation to us is one to one two thousand years later. He is watching what you are doing in the batter's box regarding your giving. Does this make you nervous, or are you glad His eye is on you?

A second batting concept naturally arises from magnitude of her gift.

Sacrificially Generous Players Know The Team Owner Owns Everything

After watching rich people put large amounts of coinage into the tithe boxes, Jesus was amazed when He watched the *Wonderful Widow* step up to give.

⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.

¹E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 208, states regarding polysyndeton or the use of many "ands," "In order to attract the attention of the hearer or reader, we may either use NO ANDS, or we may use MANY ANDS. Man may use these figure, however, without sufficient reason, and unwisely: but the Holy Spirit ever uses words in all perfections, and it behooves us carefully to note whatever He thus calls our attention to.

² Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 548.

³Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity* (Carol Stream: Taylor House Publishers, 2003), 3-4.

Robert Stein breaks down her gift with these words:

Mark explains the value of the two λεπτά for his readers by converting them into more familiar Roman coinage. Two λεπτά equal the smallest Roman coin, the quadran. (The Latin term is transliterated into Greek as κοδράντης.) A quadran equals one-quarter of the value of the next Roman coin, the assarion, or “as,” which in turn is worth one-sixteenth of a denarius. Thus the widow’s contribution was the equivalent of one sixty-fourth of a denarius; a denarius was the normal pay for a day’s work (Matt. 20:1–16).⁴

In lay terms her gift was almost next to nothing, something akin to dropping two pennies in the offering basket; however, this was all she had, according to the omniscient Christ. Shocking. She, who really needed both of those coins, gave both of them to God. She could have posited an argument to keep at least one of them, but she didn’t. Because she possessed a firm understanding of God’s providence, care, and compassion, especially for widows, and because she wanted to express her love and devotion to Him, she gave all she had. Amazing.

Really, from a worldly perspective would you think her action dripped with wisdom? If she had wondered into your office for wisdom and council about giving, would you tell her, “Yeah, go ahead and give your last cent to God”? Or would you tell us, “Look, God doesn’t want everything you have financially speaking. So, wait until you get a better job, a few shekels in the bank, and then you can start thinking about swinging away at the financial tithing plate.” Jesus, conversely classifies her as a wise woman because her giving illustrated her implicit trust in His sovereign leadership over her life. No, the text doesn’t say this is how she always gave, but in this one instance, at this one at bat she swung for the fences based on what she knew about the character of God Almighty.

What about you as a player on God’s team? Do you so trust Him to care for you that you could/will take a radical, sacrificial and highly generous step with your giving to our building endeavor? Let me put this in different terms. Let me say that one more time: *The greater your view of the living God, the greater your desire and ability to be sacrificially generous.* How great is your view of your Savior as He says, “Batter Up!”?

A third hitting point regarding giving is this . . .

Sacrificially Generous Players Know Player Contracts Impact Play

One after the other, the wealthy lined up and stood there forever depositing their money in the trumpet adorned boxes. I’m sure it was an endless sound of, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink as their silver and gold wounds its way into the boxes. All of this, of course, was followed by the *Wonderful Widow*’s almost inaudible brassy tink, tink.

Jesus’ analysis of these two approaches to giving is most interesting.

⁴³ Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on” (Mark 12).

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 579.

“Calling” is an aorist participle from the word *proskalesamenos* (προσκαλεσάμενος). As used in Mark’s gospel, it is a trip word that discussion about discipleship was about to occur. Interestingly enough, we find it in Mark 8, verses 1 and 34.

In those days again, when there was a great multitude and they had nothing to eat, He called (προσκαλεσάμενος) His disciples and said to them . . . and He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

Radical sacrifice of everything is what mature and devoted discipleship is all about. If you want to follow hard after Him, then He demands that you hold nothing back and allow Him to use all of you to advance the power of the gospel. When Jesus called His disciples by means of this word, they all knew some heavy duty teaching, followed by a big challenge was in the offing. They must have anticipated that, too, as Jesus employed the same word again in this Treasury setting.

What we learn is most fascinating. Those who appeared to give God the most really gave God the least, while the widow who gave God the least really gave God the most. How intriguing. At best, this tells us something about how the possession of larger portfolios can negatively impact our giving in a sacrificially generous fashion. The principle shouldn’t be missed: *As our level of earnings goes up there is the sinful tendency for our level of giving to go down.* That’s worth a restatement in your mind. Studies show that someone making \$10,000 in the States typically gives 5.5% to charity, while those making \$100,000 only give 2.9%. Interesting. I guess greed must kick in the more one makes. Jesus specifically concludes, like a judge weighing the cold, hard facts, that the rich people gave less than the widow, even though their financial gifts dwarfed hers.

Let’s break this down. Say a man making \$500,000 stepped up to put 10%, or \$50,000 in the tithe box. From the world’s vantage point that would look like a stellar, super spiritual amount. He would also have to bring an entourage with him to carry all that coinage, and I’m sure he would occupy that box for quite some time. Why, the priests might even have to come out and switch the filled up box several times as he tithed. Jesus did not condemn the gifts of the rich, either. He merely made a factual statement. They only appeared to give more but they did not. Why? Because they had plenty of money left over to enjoy all the niceties of life.

All of this should make you stop and ask yourself. One, what salary has the Lord graciously allowed me to make? Two, do I typically think I have given a lot simply because it looks like a lot, financially speaking? Three, as my level of finances have increased has my giving to God decreased, which can happen, or has it increased? Four, what would radical, sacrificial and generous giving look like in my life? Five, do I usually give from my excess and never to a point my accountant might think is alarming? Six, does my standard of giving ever rise while leaving my standard of living at the same level? Seven, has God blessed me for such a time as this, and, if so, what am I going to do about it?

It is true as the baseball game is long: sacrificially generous players know contracts, or the amount they make can negatively impact play, and that is why they discipline themselves to give to God above and beyond their living standard.

Enter the *Wonderful Widow*.

Even though her standard of living went down, her standard of giving went up into the spiritual stratosphere. She gave and had literally nothing left over. Not that God wants us to do

this all the time, but there are times when, based on the Spirit's leading, this is just what we know we must do. We leave the warm up circle, we step into the batter's box, and we swing for the proverbial fences with a gift to God that looks illogical to the world, but is most logical to Him.

Two thousand years ago, a widowed woman, probably dressed in a tattered uniform from God's team, silently and humbly dropped two seemingly measly mites into God's offering box at the Temple. We're still talking about her method of play today because not only was the Lord pleased with the amount of her small gift, He saw it as a gift of all gifts because she gave him everything she had.

Right now you are in the dugout on our team. Your name will eventually be called by the Spirit. You'll grab a bat and head to the warm up circle. You'll go through your routine, and then you'll hear that all famous "Batter Up!" The question is, How hard are you going to play when you step into that box given the need of your team?" Are you going to play it safe by giving like you usually do, which is probably well and good to a point, or are you, at this critical juncture going to play to some semblance of the Wonderful Widow? Yeah, at the end of the season, what will your story of giving say about how you played for Christ's team?

It's now time to **GET IN THE GAME**. The announcer leans into the microphone and excitedly says, **BATTER UP!**