



God's Favorite Play

The Sacrifice that Gets Us Home

by Phil Tuttle

I've prepared a lot of messages, but this was one of the hardest. What do you tell a group of thirteen-year-old baseball players on Sunday morning when they're focused on a tournament final on Sunday afternoon? What do you tell their parents and siblings, many of whom made the long road trip without any thought of attending an impromptu "church" service?

But since my son Philip was the only guy on the team with a preacher-father, I got tapped to deliver a biblical-but-not-too-churchy message. That requires a lot of wisdom, and I didn't know where to start. So I prayed. And the answer came back better than I could have hoped.

I had been thinking about a simple parable and, with the help of my daughter Emily's insights, fleshed it out before the big day. When Sunday morning came, every ballplayer, every parent, and every sibling who had made the trip was there. The boys were all in uniform, seated in the front, thinking of the clutch hits, well-timed stolen bases, and incredible catches they would soon make. They had big, heroic dreams. So I began my parable with a big question: What is God's favorite play?

Silence. No one had an answer, so I offered my opinion: "I think God's favorite play would have to be the bunt."

"Cause it's not being selfish," one of the boys suggested.

"True, but I think there's more to it than that," I said. "What do we call it when someone bunts?"

"A sacrifice."

“Right, a sacrifice. And look at the language we use for it. You can ‘lay down’ a bunt, and you can ‘give yourself up’ for the team. The reason the bunt is probably God’s favorite play is because that’s exactly what Jesus did for us. He laid Himself down and He gave Himself up. John 15:13 tells us, ‘Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.’ Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice.”

I looked at one of the boys whose reputation for avoiding bunts had become a humorous part of team lore. “Why do you hate them so much?” I asked.

“It’s a wimpy thing to do,” he said.

“That’s what most people think. It makes us look weak. It goes against our nature. Even Jesus tried to shake off the bunt sign the night before He was crucified, but what did He do in the end? He did what was best for the team.”

I went on to explain the gospel and then brought the point home—literally. “What’s the ultimate goal of a bunt?”

“To move the runner,” several said in unison.

“Really?” I asked. “What good does it do to just move a runner? What’s the real goal?”

“To get him home.”

“That’s right. And to get him home how?”

“Safely,” they answered. It was starting to sink in.

“One last question,” I told them. “What’s the worst thing that can happen if you’re the one who makes the sacrifice?”

“That the idiot on third base doesn’t move,” said one.

“That’s right. And there are only two reasons that could happen,” I suggested. “First, he wouldn’t break for home if he hadn’t seen the sign. You can’t ever say now that you haven’t seen God’s bunt sign, because I’ve just explained why Jesus sacrificed Himself for you. And reason number two is if the runner didn’t really believe his teammate would follow through on the sign. The question is, then, do you really believe Jesus would make that sacrifice for you?”

There was a long silence. No one moved.

“I think God has enjoyed watching you guys play this weekend,” I continued. “And I think His favorite play is the bunt. That’s the play He called to make it possible—for whoever is willing to believe—to make it home safely.”

Later that afternoon, our boys did whatever it took to make it around to home. But I have a hunch that some of them may have already done that earlier in the day—and they didn’t even have to slide.