

People who run ball clubs, they think in terms of buying players. Your goal shouldn't be to buy players, your goal should be to buy wins. And in order to buy wins, you need to buy runs.

You're trying to replace Johnny Damon. The Boston Red Sox see Johnny Damon and they see, "star," whose worth seven and a half million dollars a year.

When I see Johnny Damon, what I see is an imperfect understanding of where runs come from. The guy's got a great glove, he's a decent lead off hitter, he can steal bases – but is he worth 7.5 million dollars a year the Boston Red Sox are paying him? No.

*Baseball thinking is medieval. They are asking all the wrong questions...*

Baseball in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century looked much different that it does today. Speed was more of a priority than power. Stolen bases were the means by which players were advanced around the bases more so than legitimate hits off the bat. Between [1900](#) and [1920](#), there were 13 occasions when the league leader in home runs had fewer than 10 home runs for the season, and just four where the league leaders had 20 or more homers. Compare that figure to 2012 where league leader in home runs was 42.

It was during this, "Dead Ball Era" that players were being evaluated according to hits and their ability to get on base – statistics that were later discarded as antiquated by scouts and General Managers who became more enamored with home run hitters and athletes that could be categorized as, "stars."

But in 2002, Billy Beane, the General Manager of the Oakland A's, deployed a new approach to the way in which players were evaluated. And with a budget that was far less than many other teams, he assembled a cast of athletes that were not considered standouts, yet they went on to set an American League record for the most consecutive wins that season.

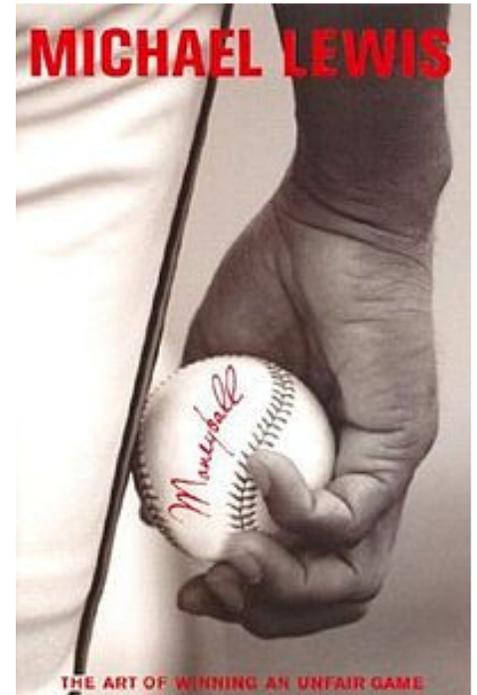
There's one particular scene in the movie where the staff is talking about various players and the one sentence that is repeated throughout the meeting, to the point where it's obviously irritating those who are approaching the game from a more traditional perspective, is: "Because he gets on base."

Folks, I want to tell you that there is a message in this movie that goes beyond baseball. And this morning, I want to show you how this, "getting on base" applies to the way in which Satan attempts to undermine, distract and ultimately destroy you without you even being aware of it.

And then, using the same illustration, I want to show you how God can and does use the ordinary and the incremental to accomplish the extraordinary in ways that surpass even your wildest expectations.

Are you ready?

Buckle up! Let's do this!



## II) A Lion

1 Peter 5:8 describes Satan as a roaring lion. Don't forget that while this lion roars, don't forget that he also prowls.

**Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)**

A lion approaches his prey with stealth and discretion. He knows that in the absence of a credible strategy, his chance of bringing down his target is minimal.

In a similar fashion, Satan is not especially obvious in his tactics. Right and wrong are intentionally diluted so that compromises become palatable. Revelation 12:9 refers to the devil as the great serpent and for good reason. As a snake, the devil was cunning when he convinced Adam and Eve that rebellion was actually enlightened thinking and disobedience was really a wise course of action.

And how did all this come about? How does Satan bring down a good man and ruin him on the rocks of scandal and moral failure?

It all starts by just getting on base.

## II) Some Simple Questions – a Few Base Hits

**Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’? (Gen 3:1)**

### A) Man on First

The fact that Eve is even conversing with the devil is a base hit for the enemy. There's a dialogue that's occurring that should've even be happening.

When Satan comes knocking on your door, you need to take the same approach that Jesus did when Satan was attempting to influence Him through the counsel of Peter. Remember?

**Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men. (Matt 16:23)**

Even the Son of God didn't give Satan the chance to really start talking, and we don't need to do any different.

### B) Man on Second

But Eve's talking to Satan so now there's a man on first. Now he's up to bat again and proceeds to get another man on base by bringing into question the meaning of God's words. He asks, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

Satan knows exactly what God said, he's just trying to assert some room for doubt in order to get the idea of disobedience to look like a good choice.

Satan tried the same strategy with Christ in Matthew 4:

**“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ““He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” (Matt 4:6)**

The passage Satan was quoting was legitimate. He wasn't leaving anything out, except for the context of that passage and that, actually, makes all the difference.

Psalms 91 talks about how the person who trusts in God is protected, as opposed to the person who tests God. The person who intentionally acts foolishly in order to prove the Strength and Reality of God, or the one who behaves indignantly as a way to show contempt for God is sinning. You see that in Deuteronomy 6:16, which is the Scripture that Jesus quotes in response to Satan's misrepresentation of the Bible.

Eve, on the other hand, allows herself to consider if Satan doesn't have a point. Meanwhile, Adam is right there beside her saying nothing, which implies that he was in total agreement with Eve (see Gen 3:6)

### **C) Bases Loaded**

Now Satan doesn't have to do much at all save simply give Eve the opportunity to look at an option that a moment ago wasn't even on her screen. It says in Genesis 3:6:

**When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom...(Gen 3:6)**

In the space of a few verses, a very short conversation has Eve is now viewing the one tree that God had specifically placed off limits as a tree that offered the best of everything: food, aesthetics and wisdom. What a tree! So now, thanks to a man on first and second, all Satan's got to do is barely make contact with the ball and the bases are loaded.

### **D) Grand Slam**

It's not over. Adam and Eve could show some restraint – maybe even resolve to go back to God and ask Him to qualify some things. But Satan is up to bat again and this time, he hauls back and sends the ball out of the park.

He doesn't even have to say anything, he just lets Eve take a bite, hand it to her husband and just like that, game over!

### **III) That's the Way We Roll!**

When you look at some of the more dramatic scandals in Scripture, you see a common thread in that the decision that produced all of the tragic consequences was prefaced with a collection of seemingly insignificant and even innocent compromises.

Base hits!

## **A) Saul**

### **1) A Man of Standing**

When Saul is first introduced in 1 Samuel 9, he's described as a man of standing, a young man without equal in all of Israel.

After his first major military victory, he gives glory to God – an indicator of godly character. He's embraced by all of Israel and they have a great celebration to officially herald Saul as their king.

### **2) Acting Like a Fool**

But then in chapter 13, Saul disobeys Samuel's instructions and does something unbelievably foolish by offering up the burnt offering and the fellowship offering – a task reserved specifically for priests (see Lev 1; Dt 12:5-14).

In chapter 15, Saul blatantly disobeys God's commands as articulated by Samuel and determines not to completely destroy the Amalekites as he had been commanded, but rather saves the best of the spoils for himself and his men. It's at this point that God makes it clear that Saul has lost all favor with the Lord and he has been rejected as king.

### **3) Talking with a Witch**

Saul continues his downward descent into pride and foolishness. By 1 Samuel 28, he's so depraved, he's willing to consult with a witch – which was a violation of his own law in terms of consulting with a sorceress and witchcraft was a capital offense (1 Sam 28:3; Ex 22:18).

Saul didn't start out as someone who was willing to interact with mediums. Satan didn't go for a home run in 1 Samuel 13, he just got on base by convincing Saul that he could take it upon himself to usurp the authority of a priest. After that, it was a just a matter of loading up the bases until he was so hardened spiritually, he could stomach the idea of seeking counsel from a witch.

## **B) David**

You can tell Satan has already got some guys on when you read the first few verses of 2 Samuel 11. David's home when he should be away and he's able to make some really bad decisions without really thinking about it until Nathan confronts him chapter 12. By that point, David has committed two capital offenses. Isn't it amazing how one night can ruin the hundreds that follow? And it all started by Satan getting on base.

## **C) Peter**

### **1) On This Rock?**

Matthew 16 is amazing. In verse 18, Jesus affirms Peter in front of everybody by changing his name to, "Rock" and it would be upon this foundation that Christ would build His church!

Wow!

But then Satan is able to get on base, apparently, because not even 10 verses later, perhaps emboldened by Christ's recent affirmation, Peter is trying to tell Jesus what to do by telling Him that He needs to quit talking about the cross.

## **2) Man on Second and Third**

Then in John 13, Jesus is establishing a template of servanthood by washing His disciples' feet. But when He gets to Peter, again Jesus has to contend with a combination of humility and pride when Peter tells Him that He's not going to wash his feet.

Man on second.

A little bit later when Jesus is alerting His crew that He's headed in a direction that they cannot go, referring to the cross, Peter says that he wants to follow Him, that he would be willing to die for Him.

Man on third.

## **3) It's Outta Here!**

By John 18:26, all it takes is a servant girl to challenge Peter as to whether or not he's one of Christ's disciples to get Peter to deny that he even knows the Man Who, a moment ago, was Someone that Peter said he would die for. By saying that he's not one of Jesus' disciples, he wrecks himself on the shores of his own ego and self-sufficiency. Short of a miracle, Peter is poised to fade into a humiliated brand of obscurity.

Game over.

## **IV) How To Win an Unfair Game**

Satan doesn't play fair. He'll attack you where you're the most vulnerable and he'll do his best to ensure that you're not even aware of it.

So how do you beat him? How do you even attempt to win what appears to be a very unfair game?

You don't. Christ already has.

### **A) You Are From God**

In 1 John 4:4, it says:

**You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 Jn 4:4)**

When he says the we are, "from God," he's saying that we have been born of God, that God is our Heavenly Father. Now, connect the dots with me:

Romans 8:31 says:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31)

## B) God Lives in You

God is more than our advocate, He's not just a coach on the sidelines barking out orders and offering encouragement. His Spirit lives within us. As a matter of fact, when you look at John 14:20, you can see just how substantial that Presence is:

**On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.  
(Jn 14:20)**

Should you choose to face the campaigns of Satan on your own, you are declining a line of defense that would otherwise require Satan to get past God, then Jesus before he could even interact with you. And then he has to contend with the fact that Jesus is reinforcing your resolve and perspective from within you.

Take together, there's no way that Satan is going to influence you which is why it says in James 4:7:

**Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (Jas 4:7)**

But it's not you he's fleeing from, rather he's running away from the Power of God that works within you.

David captures that dynamic real well in Psalm 44:6-8:

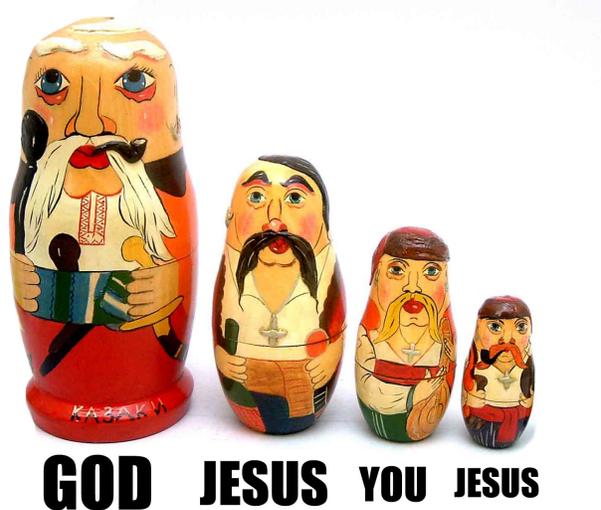
**I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. (Ps 44:6-8)**

## V) Big Hitters in Scripture

The illustration of, "Moneyball" up to this point has been used to demonstrate how Satan can effect monumental damage through the accomplishment of seemingly incremental advances. By getting a man on first and consistently advancing runners, he's able to score to the point where he can ruin you.

But this illustration works the other way as well.

Oftentimes we evaluate what's going on in our lives based on quick and dramatic improvements in our situation. When we're working towards a goal, for example, we fail to acknowledge and celebrate getting on base. It's not unless we're rounding third and headed for home that we feel like we're making any progress.



But, again, when you look at those in Scripture who were “big hitters,” you’re confronted with the subtle yet present reality that they were hitting singles far more than they were hitting homers. But that’s how games are won! It’s the abundance of consistent base hits that advance your runners around the ball diamond that produce wins.

Take for example, Joseph.

## **A) Joseph**

### **1) Base Hit #1 – Slavery**

Genesis 37:36 has Joseph being sold into slavery. Surely he’s thinking that he has struck out, but in fact, it’s a base hit! God needs Joseph in Egypt and perhaps He needs to teach Joseph some things about humility as well.

This is a great model of what it says in Romans 8:28:

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)**

### **2) Base Hit #2 – Prison**

Joseph works for Potiphar for a while and does extremely well. Maybe he’s thinking that he’s getting some men on base as a result of the success he’s been able to accomplish on Potiphar’s behalf. But it’s actually him being wrongfully accused and landing in prison that puts another man on.

Why? Because he has to meet and impress two prisoners, one of whom would be able to secure Joseph’s freedom.

### **3) Base Hit #3 – Missed Opportunity**

One of the guys that Joseph met in prison was the former cupbearer to Pharaoh. Joseph was able to accurately interpret a dream for him that translated into his release and restoration to his former position. In Genesis 40:14, Joseph says:

**But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. (Gen 40:14)**

Can you hear the sense of urgency in Joseph’s voice? According to Genesis 37:2, Joseph was 17 when he sold into slavery. In Genesis 41:46, he’s 30 when he assumes his position as second in command over Egypt. That’s 13 years spent as either a slave or a prisoner. That’s a long time and it’s easy to imagine that when Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was back in Pharaoh’s court, he was thinking that this was his chance to get out of jail and start his life. But Genesis 40:23 says that the cupbearer forgot all about him.

How does that happen? How can a man who’s been in prison, suddenly released and restored to his former status, forget all about the man who gave him hope, who gave him a forecast that proved to be

true. How can you wake up that first morning, not having had to sleep on a stone slab and forget all about the one who was in charge of the prison, who correctly interpreted a dream you had and gave you a glimpse of the amazing turn of events that led to your release?

I don't think you can unless God intervenes and makes for a situation where you can forget.

Look at Psalm 139:16:

**your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:16)**

Take a look at Proverbs 21:1:

**The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Pro 21:1 [see also Ps 37:23; Prov 16:9; 19:21; 20:24])**

According to Scripture, Joseph stayed in prison another two years after the cupbearer was released. That's 730 mornings waking up to the smell of prison and a thousand and one reasons to despair and give up.

But however dejected Joseph was prone to feel upon realizing that he wasn't going to be getting out of prison any time soon, regardless of how certain he might've been that he had once again swung and missed, he had gotten another man on base. The bases are now loaded, and look what's happening now...

#### **4) Grand Slam!**

I wonder what kind of morning it was the day that Pharaoh sent for Joseph. I wonder if it was raining. I wonder what Joseph was doing. I wonder if he had any idea what was about to happen when Pharaoh's messenger came to the prison to get Joseph and bring him before Pharaoh in order to interpret his dream.

We don't know. But we do know that in the space of day, Joseph was promoted to a rank that far exceeded that of his warden or his former boss. He was put in charge of all of Egypt! Talk about a grand slam!

But do you see what had to be in place in order for this Grand Slam to happen:

- In order for Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, someone had to be in Pharaoh's court who could recommend Joseph.
- In order for the cupbearer to be aware of Joseph, he and Joseph would have to serve time together in the same prison.
- In order for Joseph to be in prison, he would have to be wrongfully accused by Potiphar.
- In order for Potiphar to be able to accuse Joseph, Joseph would have to be a slave in his household.

- In order for Joseph to be a slave in Potiphar's home, he would have to be sold into slavery by his brothers.

Joseph spent the first 30 years of his life having to wrestle with what appeared to be one setback after another. Instead of knocking it out of the park, he was having to settle for mere base hits. But again, that's how games are won!

## **B) Paul the Slugger**

### **1) His Story**

There's a phrase that shows up fairly frequently when it comes to the apostle, Paul. That phrase is, "They tried to kill him."

Acts 9, Paul gets saved, but his passion and ability to persuade others that Jesus was the Christ inspires the Jews in Damascus to try and kill him. He gets lowered in a basket through a hole in the city wall and makes his way to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, he's debating with the Grecian Jews and in Acts 9:29, they also decide that Paul needs to die, so his friends help get out of town and he heads to Tarsus.

Later Barnabas heads to Tarsus in order to bring him to Antioch where the church is growing. It's at Antioch, under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas that those who believed in the Lord were called Christians. After working there for about a year, Paul and Barnabas are tasked with taking a donation to the Christians in Jerusalem. After doing that, they returned to Antioch, but not for long. In Acts 13, they're commissioned as missionaries and set out on what would be Paul's first missionary journey.

In Iconium, Acts 14, a plot is initiated to stone Paul and his companions. They flee to Lystra where after healing a man who had been crippled since birth, Paul is stoned (Acts 14:20). They leave him for dead, but he recovers and heads back to Antioch.

In Antioch, they're confronted with some folks who want to insist that you had to follow some Jewish traditions in order to be saved (circumcision). Paul and Barnabas argue with them and wind up travelling to Jerusalem to get a bottom line from the elders there. After making their case, everyone concludes that God has opened up the way of salvation to everybody and not just the Jews. Therefore, any sort of legal restrictions that are carried over from the old ceremonial code are considered obsolete.

Paul and Barnabas head back to Antioch and not long afterwards decide to go and visit the churches they had started previously. They wound up parting company because Paul was hesitant about Mark, since he had abandoned them on their last missionary journey (Acts 13:13) So Paul heads out with Silas and Barnabas heads out with Mark.

After a stop in Derbe, it's in Lystra where Paul meets a young man named Timothy and he joins Paul and Silas for the rest of their journey.

In Philippi, they run into a bit of a bump in the road. They're not killed, but they're flogged and thrown into prison after having delivered a young girl from a demon. In this case, the demon had facilitated

through her a very profitable fortune telling business which caused her owners to become very upset with Paul and Silas and had them arrested and beaten. God miraculously delivered them that night, however, and they headed for Thessalonica.

Paul made an impression everywhere he went. Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus. Paul was able to accomplish a great deal in Ephesus and stayed there for two years before a riot compelled him to move on and he headed back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:1).

In Acts 21:14, it says that the whole city was in an uproar when they discovered Paul at the temple and were in the process of killing him when the commander of the Roman guard established some order and had Paul arrested.

In order to get a bottom line as to why Paul was such a problem in the minds of the Jews, he had the Sanhedrin assemble at which point Paul was able to address them. Again, Paul in typical form, is able to say just the right thing at the right time and he's able to inspire an argument between the members of the Sanhedrin itself. The dispute becomes so heated, that the Roman commander has to forcibly extract Paul from their midst and bring him back to prison.

The following night, it says in Acts 23:11, the Lord Himself appeared to Paul and said, "Buckle up! You've testified about me in Jerusalem. You'll now have that chance in Rome!"

Of course the next morning, there's a plot to kill Paul in place and the Roman commander has to move Paul in order to guarantee him a fair and impartial hearing. So he transfers him to Caesarea where Paul is able to proclaim Christ to the governor, the king and ultimately he would go to Rome, the capital city of the largest empire in the known world at that time.

It was while under house arrest in Rome, that Paul wrote much of what we now know as the New Testament. In addition, for two whole years while he was waiting for his adversaries to press their case, he spoke and preached while living in a rented house guarded by a single soldier.

## 2) His Hits

Paul made an impact like no other. The things that we read as setbacks and hardships are base hits. He's not being defeated, his message is not being ignored. Because of his Jewish pedigree, he has credibility (Phil 4:3-6). But it's because of those things we would regard as failures and hardships that he had influence.

People had heard of Paul. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem in Acts 21:28, they said, "This is the man!" He was regarded as a serious threat, and he was!

The Christian church spread because of what God does and did through people like Paul.

But how often did Paul speak before a large group and see the kind of response the disciples saw on the Day of Pentecost when 3,000 people were added to the church that day (Acts 2:41)?

He had some big crowds, and he did get a good response from time to time, but God used a lot of base hits with Paul and, frankly, it's those base hits that would go on to result in churches being planted that Paul never saw or visited.

Talk about a winning record!

## **VI) Conclusion**

What does all this mean? I'll tell you and here's your, "invitation:" Recognize the significance of the incremental. In other words:

### **Embrace the Base**

Satan works through some very trivial looking things from time to time to produce a windfall of failure that you don't even want to imagine.

On the other hand, God often works through some very ordinary and even defeating looking things to advance runners around the base.

Whether you're the one pitching or you're the one up to bat, make sure that it's God working in and through you (Phil 2:13) and you do that by saying on top of your game spiritually.

Be a man of prayer, know the Word of God and recognize His Power and Purpose in all things.

How many of you this morning need to do some business here at the altar? How many of you are letting Satan effect some compromises in you that represent putting a man on first? How many of you are discouraged, not because God isn't working in your life, but because you aren't appreciating the significance of the base hits that He's accomplished through you.

And how many of you are clueless because you're not saved? The only scoreboard that represents any real success let alone lasting fulfillment is the one that reflects the contest being fought in the spiritual realm. Don't let Satan having gotten a man on first by convincing you that it's your business card or your checking account or whatever else it is that you would point to as being evidence of your being a success – don't let that imperfect understanding of life persist any longer. Start making some game changing plays today by inviting Christ into your life and letting His Power work through that bat of yours and start getting some people on base for real!

Let's pray!

1. Wikipedia, "Dead Ball Era" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead-ball\\_era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead-ball_era), accessed September 20, 2012. Compared to the Texas Rangers average in 2012 which was 5.09 runs (<http://www.teamrankings.com/mlb/stat/runs-per-game>)