

SPIRIT BREEZE

WIND OF THE SPIRIT MINISTRIES Newsletter

JANUARY 2013

SANDLOT SOFTBALL—SANDLOT THEOLOGY

SOME RULES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Sandlot softball! That was our game of choice. When I was a boy we played softball in the sandy, weed-choked field next to our home. We had an old ragged, well used softball and we had only a flat piece of board for the bat. The baselines were imaginary, as were the distances between them. Home plate was a piece of cardboard. The bases were marked by a certain rock or tree stump or mound of dirt. The outfield boundary was an imaginary line between two trees or bushes. Anything that happened to be hit beyond that was considered a homerun.

We had lots of fun - most of the time. Because there was only an imaginary line between home plate and first and third bases, arguments began to show up as to whether it was a fair or foul ball. Then, too, did the ball actually go beyond the imaginary line between the two trees or bushes in the outfield before someone caught it? Questions also arose as to whether our feet actually touched or missed the rock or tree stump or mound of dirt while running the bases.

Another issue that caused heated arguments was whether the pitcher had thrown a "strike" or "ball." There were no umpires. Every player assumed the job of umpire. Since no one actually knew the rules for the game most of them existed only in the imagination of the players. Things generally went well until someone disagreed with another person's imagined rule - especially when the disagreement happened with the owner of the ball. During those times, more often than not, that person took his ball and went home. That ended the game.

Upon entering Junior high and High school, I began to participate in organized sports. It was then that I discovered that there were actual boundary lines and rules related to all the games. Beyond that, all players were required to follow the rules in the rulebook and stay within the boundaries. Changes were not up for debate.

The softball and baseball fields had clearly

marked baselines with real bases spaced at equal distances. There was a pitcher's mound and a backstop to capture errant pitches that the catcher might miss. There was an outfield fence that determined if the batter had indeed hit a homerun. There was even an umpire that called "strike," "ball" or, "you're out."

I soon learned that these same rules apply whether a kid engages in them in Grade school, High school, College or later as an Olympic competitor or Professional Athlete. All the sports have rules and they all have lines and boundaries. No player or spectator is offended by the rules and boundaries, because each and every participant is required to abide by the same rules and stay within the same boundary lines.

Boundaries and lines are not made to restrict those who engage in the sport. Neither are they designed in order to curtail any free exercise of unique and special gifts that an athlete wishes to show off as they engage in the sport. They are there to make the game equal for everyone and to free everyone to play the game with excitement and abandon. The lines are there to make the game enjoyable for the spectators as well as the players. Even the spectators, who are not physically involved in the sport, root for their participating individual or team, knowing that, win or lose, everyone is having to play by the same rules, though they may heartily disagree with how the umpire or referee interprets the rules.

When rules and boundaries are honored, the games proceed in an organized and enjoyable way. When anyone steps out of bounds or chooses to disobey the rules, a referee's whistle is blown, a particular game rule is applied according to the offense, and the game is interrupted only for a time until a signal is given for it to begin once again.

Regardless of the offense, and even though there may be disagreement as to the nature of the offense or penalty applied, the rules are never changed. Neither are the boundaries moved in order to make the offender, or the offender's supporters, happy. The rules and boundaries were

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Revs. Larry and Audrey Eddings
Phone and FAX: [360] 308-0200.....

PO Box 175, Silverdale, WA 98383
email woseddings@msn.com

not going to change simply because I didn't happen to like them or because I felt offended when the whistle was blown for my infraction.

In much the same way, it is my conviction that life - especially life within the Judeo-Christian faith, can be lived out with a sandlot mentality or mindset. Or, on a much more positive and freeing note, it can be lived out within the boundaries, markers and rules laid down by the One who created life in the first place. God has carefully laid out in the Rulebook, [Scriptures, if you will], what is required of those who desire to experience life at an abundant, fulfilling and freeing level.

When the Twelve Hebrew tribes were called into being as a nation, God gave some very specific boundaries and guidelines. They were established, not to restrict, but so that God's people would be enabled to live life freely and to the full in their relationship with God and with each other. [Exodus 20:3-17] God set certain boundaries in order for that to happen.

As long as Israel abided by these basic rules and stayed within those boundaries, things went very well and they enjoyed God's presence and abundance. When they ignored or disobeyed the rules altogether - by continually stepping out of bounds, they suffered the consequences. God blew the whistle.

When Jesus came to live among us, he did not come to change God's rule book or to reset the boundaries of God's plan for abundant life. He made that very clear when he said, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them."* [Matthew 5:17-20]

Jesus expected his followers to play by the same rules that God had already established for God knew what he was doing when the rules were first established. God did not have second thoughts. God had spoken through the Prophet Balaam [Numbers 23:19] and said, *"God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind."*

Jesus did not come to tell us that God had changed his mind. He did not come to change the rules or the boundaries of God's plan for human life. He came as Light to enlighten us on God's plan and put within us the desire and ability to accept and play by the rules and boundaries already established. He was not involved in giving us a sandlot theology that changes according to human whims, players' preferences, vain imaginations or real or perceived offenses.

Jesus did not come to tell us that he was establishing a New Covenant because God had changed his mind about the first set of rules or that they were offensive to some of the players and too hard for them to follow. He came to model for us what life is like when we obediently follow the rules and stay within the boundaries. Then we can have life, have it abundantly and to the full.

God's boundaries and rules are put in place, not to restrict us or take away our freedom. They are there to provide the way by which life can be lived freely and to the full in all our relationships - with God, with our families and with our larger human family. As long as we follow the rules and stay within the boundaries established by God, things go very well. Whenever we step out of bounds or choose to devise alternate rules, things do not go very well.

It is my conviction that in these contemporary times, many within the Church, including some elected leaders, are operating according to sandlot rules with a sandlot theology about a God whose mind is continually changing. Some may call it progressive revelation. These new revelations usually come to those who desire to change the rules to conform to the mindset of those who want to live the Christian life, but to do it without offending or being offended.

The trouble with a sandlot mentality and sandlot theology is that things are in a state of continual flux and there remains little stability, confidence, assurance or true freedom. It may all be different tomorrow because someone has made a well-articulated speech or written a scholarly book that has provided a most convincing human argument that this is a new day. Thus the boundaries should be moved to accommodate new revelations, which also mandates the need for a new set of rules. This, of course, may be changed once again tomorrow when a more convincing speech is given or another more scholarly book is written.

Such sandlot theology makes one wonder what would happen if God, getting tired of all the persuasive speeches and arguments, were to just take his ball and go home? But it won't happen! God is in this for keeps. The stakes are too high! God's rules and boundaries are not going to change just because someone - inside or outside the church, doesn't like them and might be offended by them. God has a goal in mind for all who are willing to allow his Spirit to move us to *"follow God's decrees and be careful to keep his laws."* That goal is eternal life in God's eternal kingdom. Homerun!

As you prepare for the new year—with or without making New Year resolutions, it may be best to live life by God's established rules and boundaries rather than with a sandlot theology. LE

WEB-PAGE

Wind of the Spirit Web Page address is

www.wosm-nw.org

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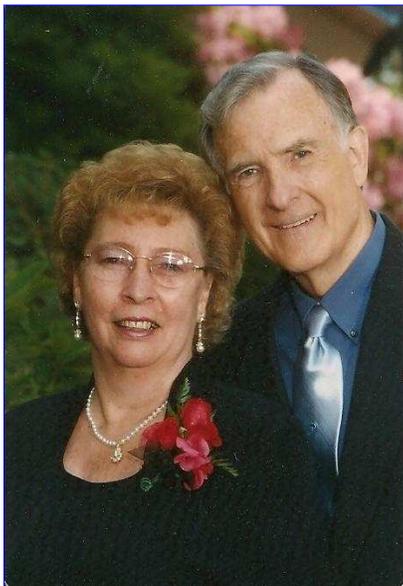
“You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” Jesus, [John 3:8]

MINISTRY CALENDAR

PLEASE POST AND PRAY FOR THESE EVENTS

OTHER MINISTRY EVENTS ARE IN THE PLANNING STAGES

Eddings Email address: woseddings@msn.com



JANUARY 19-27	Mission Trip to The Philippines, Rev. David Sablan In Manila area.
28-30	To Bayambong to be with Rev. Mateo Manuel
FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 3	HEALING ACADEMY at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY