

# Book Reviews: Abilene pastor swings for the bleachers with his first book

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ABILENE—A longtime Baptist preacher writes his first book. It's about baseball. And it has no Scripture. It's an unlikely scenario, but, in life as in baseball, unlikely things happen.

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Phil Christopher, pastor of First Baptist Church in Abilene, has teamed up with Glen Dromgoole to co-author *Parables from the Diamond: Meditations for Men on Baseball & Life*, recently published by Bright Sky Press.

Dromgoole, a newspaper reporter and editor with several successful books to his credit, pitched the book idea to Christopher. The pastor was doubtful, since he'd never written a book before.

But as any preacher knows, sermons are everywhere, and Christopher finds it easy to see them in baseball.

The book is a collection of 50 lessons, most just one page long, from "Get in the Game" to "Finding Our Way Home." Illustrations and appropriate quotes from famous people ranging from Yogi Berra to Dwight Eisenhower and St. Francis of Assisi enhance each entry. "The 3-2 Pitch" is a question for thought that concludes each meditation.

"It gives somebody something to think about during the day," Christopher said.

Originally, the 3-2 pitch feature was a prayer and the text included Scriptures, but that format changed after Christian book publishers turned

down the manuscript and Bright Sky Press agreed to print the book in a more generic version.

But if the outcome is a more successful book with a larger market, the authors aren't disappointed. The lessons are the same. And if women are offended not to be included in the target market and the book title, it doesn't mean they can't read the book.

"We really didn't want to be sexist, but it does say 'Meditations for Men,'" said Christopher, who already has caught some criticism from his daughter, who excelled as a baseball player.

"We've used baseball as a metaphor for life," Christopher said. "We're all still trying to find home. That's the point of baseball—getting home."

A quote from the late A. Bartlett Giamatti, former president of Yale University and a Major League Baseball commissioner, introduces the last parable: "You may leave home, but if you ever forget where home is, you are truly lost and without hope."

The Prodigal Son of the Bible is mentioned in that parable; so is the son who stayed home "playing it safe ... content to watch from the sidelines."

The book itself is the work of two men who both got in the game.

"We each took some of the topics," Dromgoole said. "We would each edit each other."

Christopher sought out the Scriptures that stand behind each lesson; Dromgoole came up with most of the quotations.

"We had a good relationship," Christopher said. "We each brought our unique gifts to the writing process."

If there was tension between the two, it doesn't show in the final

product—not that it was necessarily easy for Christopher to see his verbiage distilled into shorter pieces.

“It was interesting having a (former) newspaper editor who deals with conciseness write with a preacher,” Christopher said. “I’m always embellishing everything.”

Will they team up again? Maybe.

“We talked about it,” Christopher said. “I probably would like to do one on golf. That’s one of my other passions.”

Postscript: The last page of the book tells readers about the authors. Like the book itself, the information is succinct.

“Phil Christopher, a preacher with a passion for baseball, played baseball in college and coached Little League. Bats right. Throws left. Writes left.

“Glen Dromgoole is an author, journalist, and lifetime baseball fan. Bats Right. Throws right. Writes left.”

Maybe there’s a parable there too.

## **Intentional Walk: More Devotions for Baseball Fans**

By Hugh Poland (Judson Press)



Each spring, the sound of “Take Me out to the Ball Game” rings across the United States. Baseball mirrors life. No one knows how long the game will last. Runs and outs must be earned one by one. A crushed ball that blows over the fence one day becomes a routine fly the next. Pitchers accidentally give up walks—except when they’re intentional.

In his book *Intentional Walk*, Hugh Poland advocates an intentional walk with God. The meticulous baseball researcher divides his 25 devotionals into four bases and draws stories from the headlines of today and long ago, from the famous and the obscure, from the poignant and the popular. The music minister titles each meditation with a baseball saying, begins with a meaningful Scripture, continues with an anecdote from the sport, applies a related spiritual truth and concludes with a personal prayer.

*Intentional Walk* would be a great gift for any baseball fan who wants an intentional walk with God. But Poland’s volume also would be a wonderful intentional gift a for a baseball lover who needs to walk with Christ.

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