

The Bat

*By the Always-Right Reverend Doctor Isaiah J. Trin
(Doc Trin, for short)*

When I was about eight years old, I was a terrific baseball player. Now some of my friends might disagree with that statement, but what do they know? My problem was that I didn't have a bat. Although I didn't know it at the time, my family was too monetarily challenged (they used to call it "poor") to afford such luxuries as bats. Besides, the use of bats might lead to other things that we didn't have finances for-such as the replacement of windows.

So I spent my time swinging sticks. We very rarely got a real baseball, either, but I would go outside and swing my sticks at anything I could find. When the farm animals saw me coming, they fled to the barn for safety. Sometimes the cow refused to give milk for several days, causing great consternation in the family. Then I would lose my stick privileges, and the animals could once again feel comfortable walking in the barnyard. One of my favorite pastimes was tossing small rocks up in the air and hitting them with my stick. This resulted in a considerable amount of wear on the sticks. So I had to find a good supply. I think one of the reasons I actually got a bat was that Dad got tired of losing his lumber, and my grandfather became increasingly upset at finding rocks with the mowing machine.

Anyway, one day Buddy and I (Buddy was my neighbor from up the street-he was the only kid my age within about four miles) were outside playing baseball. We had found a real baseball that had been discarded by the high school team (these were prized possessions), and had been knocking it around the field with a stick. I saw Dad come out of his shop. He was carrying something kind of long and tapered-looking. He had a big smile on his face as if he knew that what he was about to do would really please us. When he got close enough, he held the object out for me to view and said, "Here, why don't you try this?"

I stood aghast in amazement! It was a bat-a real, live baseball bat. I started looking for the trademark, but it didn't have one. As it turns out, my father had manufactured the bat with his own hands. He wouldn't tell me how long it had taken him to make it, but he was a good carpenter, and a perfectionist. This was a flawless piece of equipment. You would not be able to tell the difference between this and any other professionally made bat. It was smooth as glass, straight as an arrow, and the wood was a nice, light color. Ted Williams would have been proud to own such a bat, if he had the opportunity. But the bat was all mine, and ole Ted would have to find his own. It took me a while to calm down. I wanted to show it to someone, but there was

really no-one there to show. My sisters wouldn't care, and I was fairly certain that the cow didn't want to see it.

After inspecting it a while, and swinging it at nothing, I figured we should put it to its intended use. After all, bats were made to swat baseballs. And if you were fortunate, it would swat them a long way. Since the bat was mine, I would be the first to use it. That's the way it worked back in the old days, before outcome-based sharing became politically correct. The owner of something got to try it first. So I stood beside home plate (a flat piece of discarded granite) and Buddy reared back and threw the ball. Normally, he would miss by a mile, and we would have to chase the ball down into the creek bed before he could throw another pitch. But this toss was true. Right across the plate, so to speak. I took my mark, lowered my shoulder, took aim, swung with all my might – and actually made contact. The result was a resounding “crack” of bat meeting ball.

But something was terribly amiss. The “crack” didn't sound exactly right. The ball didn't go far. I hesitated to look at my bat for fear of seeing what I suspected to be true, but didn't want to know. Eventually, I gathered my courage and picked up the bat to inspect the results of its first swing. A sinking feeling came over me as the reality of the situation began to unfold. Yes, it was true. There was a large, distinct crack in the bat, right about the place where my vise-grip-like hands had grasped the instrument.

This was a disaster of the greatest proportions. But not for the reason one might think. I had never had a bat before. I could get by without one again. Although it was wonderful, I hadn't used it long enough to become endeared to it. But how does one explain to one's father, who spent countless hours and energy preparing this most wonderful, gift, that it is now useless? How could I tell him that his son had ruined all of his efforts the first time he had ever touched the beautiful wand? One swing had taken me from ecstasy to agony-from the highest mountain to the deepest valley.

I couldn't. I just couldn't tell him. I could not bring myself to confess my transgression, even though I had used the bat for its intended purpose and probably had no cause to feel guilty at all. It wasn't really guilt that I felt, anyway. It was that dread of imparting sorrow and disappointment to someone who loved me and had put forth great efforts on my behalf. And I had been responsible for ruining the whole thing.

I tried to patch up the bat. I got some old black electrician's tape and put it on the handle so the crack was not obvious to the casual observer. I picked up the bat and swung it once in a while. But it never struck out at a baseball in anger again. It sat in loneliness behind the closet door, so it could not be seen as a reminder of my failings.

I never told my father about breaking the bat. And he never said anything about it. He obviously observed the fact that I didn't use the bat any more. And now that I look back on it, he probably had it all figured out. And he might have even felt badly that he hadn't been able to make a bat that stood up to the test in a more satisfactory manner.

But we were both silent on the subject. He was silent because I was silent. Had I been willing to talk about it, he could have repaired the bat, or made me a new one. But since I didn't wish to admit that the first one was broken, and because I wanted so desperately not to disappoint him, my relationship with him was diminished a little, and my bat remained in disuse.

I do not believe this to be an unusual occurrence in a life. Because we do not want to face those we do not wish to disappoint, we choose to do worse. We lose a portion of our relationship with them. Sometimes, because we know someone would be disappointed in us, we avoid him (or her) and completely destroy what was once a close relationship, even though we know down deep that they would forgive us to retain the relationship. We can do the same thing with our heavenly Father. Sometimes, we know that He will be disappointed in us, so we avoid discussing particular situations with Him. In so doing, we diminish our relationship with Him. He does not wish to re-hash the weather in our conversations with Him. He knows about the weather – he made it, remember? And He made us, too. He knows our frame, He remembers we are dust. Sometimes, it just seems that we would be so much better off if we, as well as He, would remember that we are dust. If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we refuse to discuss it, even if for high and noble reasons like not wanting to disappoint Him, we diminish our relationship, decrease our fellowship, and pilot our own ship.

Wouldn't it be better to confess our inabilities and let Him restore all that we need? Then we wouldn't have to leave our bat in the corner, unused, because we refuse to admit to our Father something that He already knows. Sometimes the games that we play cost us more than cows can tell.

Doc Trin