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Things They Left Behind (Work Station One)

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Roland R. Hegstad

If you were to die tomorrow, which of your treasured possessions would speak to your family and friends of lightness and joy? On the one-year

anniversary of the Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks, the *Washington Post* featured eight pages on “The Things They Left Behind.”

There were, wrote columnist Thomas Boswell, “pictures of treasured objects belonging to each of the victims of the Pentagon attack. And comments from relatives about why they were precious.”

What would you expect? Bibles with treasured passages underlined? Rosaries? Crosses well worn from caresses? A favorite sermon from family time in church? Inspirational books that brought a special lift?

Outnumbering all else, says Boswell, were “many well-worn baseball gloves and golf clubs.” Said one wife of her husband: “His entire life he loved sports, and this glove was part of him.”

Things They Left Behind

Another wife picked her husband’s “whiffle ball set to symbolize him.”

Boswell’s summary: “One thing is clear on a day like 9/11: Sports. . . . provide a place to go

when things are too much to bear or too hard to solve.”

The columnist pointed out that though “baseball, football, and other sports cancelled many games last September,” the following week the games resumed.

Said Boswell, “[Sports] fanatics have one thing in common. They never change the channel. The world has only one obsession, one grievance, one pathology, for them. And if they can, they’ll make you watch their channel all day, every day. . . . There is a schedule. The games must be played.”

Precious Objects

Don’t I know it. For years I perused TV channels for games. Football. College or professional. Baseball. Volleyball. Tennis. Golf.

Thanksgiving meals were scheduled around a football game. New Year's was not a time for resolutions, but for college bowl games.

Way back in my evangelism outpost in central Washington, I could be found at least one day a week hitting buckets of balls at the local driving range. The Lord joined me there one morning. "Roland," he said, "What are you doing here?"

"Well, Lord," I replied, "you know how exhausting evangelism can be."

"Yes," he said, "I've had a little experience with that myself."

"You've seen me out on the golf course," I continued, "slicing balls into the woods, hooking them into the pond. I'm trying to learn how to hit them straight down the fairway."

"I see," he said. "Didn't you say you played golf now for the exercise?"

"Yes."

"But don't you get more exercise when you slice balls to the right and hook them to the left than when you hit them straight down the fairway?"

Long pause. Ouch! Must I be honest? . . . "Yes, Lord."

Almost Too Much to Bear

Soon after our conversation, General Conference President William Branson came to camp meeting, held on the Walla Walla College campus. On Sabbath morning he spoke of the great challenge to take the gospel to all the world. Then he passed out

cards on which listeners could indicate what they would give sacrificially to reach unentered areas. I can still recall praying and pondering, and at last writing: "I will give one (new) set of Wilson golf clubs."

During my first years at the General Conference I enjoyed playing tennis. That is, I enjoyed it when I won. Bad shots brought an emphatic "Oh, *Roland!*" My friends still recall the abject chagrin I could work into that one phrase. Then, one day the Lord came for a little talk. "Roland," he said, "I thought you played tennis only for the exercise." (Alas, I knew where that line led!)

"You know, Roland," he continued, "I've looked at your yard and I must say, it is far from the best kept in the neighborhood." . . . The next day I put my tennis racquet away. I determined it would stay unused until I could play a game civilly. During the next two years, my lawn prospered. And so did my fellowship with God. And later I found the Lord was not averse to a friendly tennis match. In fact, I know a great husband and wife who are in the Adventist Church because the wife's Adventist tennis partner played to win!—that is, to win more than a tennis match! (Isn't that right, Raymond and Shirley Holmes!)

Introspection

Now, I want to avoid a pitfall some of my Adventist theologian friends

have tumbled into—the inclination to believe all others must go and do likewise. Truth is, every person on Earth differs in some way from another. And those differences—genetic, emotional, experiential, whatever—condition one to fear what another has no problem with, and thus entertains. I've friends who can play an occasional game of golf or tennis or baseball or whatever, without a problem. They're strong where I'm weak. I've got friends who cringe when I insist I could improve the wording of one or two of the 27 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. I, on the other hand, feel no remorse; rather, I would enjoy the challenge. So it's not up to me to insist that they adopt my view of sports or my view of theology. And vice versa. (Keep in mind that sports have attained the status of a religion, though when rightly considered, they are nevertheless nonessentials; and the theology of which I speak is in that category also.)

But back to the ball game (it's in the ninth inning). When my children were young, I once asked myself, "Which of all my minister friends would I call on for a prayer and anointing if one of my children were dying?" Not, I decided, those whose lives will ever be identified with a whiffle ball or well-worn baseball gloves, golf clubs, or tennis

racquets. The Word has a word for that: "Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." The ministers I would call, I decided, were in the sense Boswell uses, fanatics—spiritual athletes possessed by one obsession: The game must be played—the gospel must go, on swift feet, to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. This world, you see, is the Roman Colosseum of the Universe. And there are "fans" out there in the cosmic bleachers and grandstands. As Paul puts it: "We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men" (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV). *And they're cheering for us!*

So, when my time comes to sleep a moment, what shall I wish to be remembered by? The six Bibles on the credenza behind my desk will do. Each is marked exhaustively; there are cross references, not only within one Bible but from one to another. I start my mornings with them. I end my nights with them. And since I've done that, somehow my days go better. And someday I hope the Lord will find that a good part of me has been shaped by his books. And that all of me has been surrendered to his grace.

The Bibles are, to paraphrase Boswell's words, "The things I'll leave behind."

