

As God sees it: A baseball story

by [Russell Siler Jones](#) in the [July 1, 2008](#) issue

In fifth grade my Little League baseball team lost its first five games, and then our coach quit. We got a new coach, a 16-year-old named Don Crosby. Don was a great player and should have been on the high school team, but he hadn't passed enough classes to be eligible. Today he'd probably be diagnosed as having a learning disability, but back then he was just plain out of luck. Don had a brother my age named Clark and a sister named Dixie. They lived with their grandmother in a small house east of town.

Don was only four or five years older than we were, but he easily established his authority with us. He made us run lots of laps around the swing set at the far end of the school yard. He told us we were not to talk when he was talking, and when we answered him, we were to say "Yes sir" and "No sir." Our team would hustle, because any one of us who didn't hustle wouldn't play. Hustling meant, among other things, sprinting to our positions at the start of an inning and sprinting back to the dugout at the end.

Don acted like nobody bothered to tell him we were the worst team in the league. Before games he'd gather us around and have us take a knee. Then he'd deliver a pep talk that went something like this: "Fellas, I was lying awake last night, thinking about this game. Thinking about how hard you've been practicing, about how much I want you to win. And I was thinking, if we could win this game tonight . . ." Here he'd pause, to let it soak in how serious he was. "If we could win this game tonight, I'd be willing to cut off my right arm." No one laughed. Probably no one even breathed. Then he'd say: "Fellas, do you wanna win?" And we'd scream: "Yes sir!" "Do you really wanna win?" "Yes sir!" "Are you sure you wanna win?" "YES SIR!" And we'd sprint onto the field, and—lo and behold—we'd win. By the end of the season, our team had tied for the championship.

The next spring we had a different coach. He was a police officer in our town. We won our first game, lost the next four, and then—I kid you not—he quit. Someone asked Don if he'd coach us again, and he said he would.

That year some of the boys did not respond as readily to Don's authority. Several quit. We were down to ten players when our catcher, Eddie, decided he'd had enough.

I wondered what we were going to do without a catcher, and at our next practice I found out. I was the right fielder, right field being where Little League coaches everywhere play their weakest fielder. Don came over to me, put his arm on my shoulder and looked me in the eye. "Russell," he said, "I've been watching the way you throw the ball from right field. Son," he paused, "you throw like a catcher."

Though I had tried catching before, I couldn't do it. I was what was called "bat blind." Being bat blind means that when the batter swings, you blink your eyes and the ball hits you in the chest or the face. Most people are bat blind, since it is rather natural to close your eyes and flinch when someone swings a 32-inch piece of lumber in front of your face.

Don helped me put on the catching gear: first the shin guards, then the chest protector, finally the mask. He sent Lamar Maxey to the mound and had him throw me a few. Then Don stepped to the plate with a bat. Lamar threw his next pitch. Don swung, and I did not blink. I caught the ball. I was a catcher.

In the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks of the transformation that happens when we "know as we are known," when we see no longer as through a glass darkly but face to face, the way God sees. Quite often we see ourselves unclearly: as undeserving, incapable, insignificant or, conversely, as entitled, invulnerable, too significant. And our obscured vision limits us, burdens us and disheartens us.

I am not a catcher any more. I am now, among other things, a husband, father, pastoral counselor and educator. In all these roles, one of my jobs is to see beyond people's circumstances, beyond the way they see themselves, and to wonder, "When God looks at this person, who and what does God see?" I try to see what a person can't at the moment see: courage, wisdom, patience, forgiveness, the ability to do something he or she has never done before.

As I do this work, I remember how Don led me from being a bat-blind fielder to being a team catcher, and I give thanks to God, who sees us clearly, and whose belief in us can change us.