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**How the Game of Life is Played**

**1 Peter 2:13-25**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just want to thank you and praise you for the blood of the lamb. We just thank you for the incredible gift that we have received that without which we have no standing whatsoever before you. Father, thank you for the willingness to send your Son, for his willingness to die for us, for your Holy Spirit, Lord, who makes us able to understand your word. And Lord, as we enter that part of the service this morning, I pray that you would give us the ability to understand your word, to take it in and make it of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is message number ten in our series on 1 Peter, and I thought it would be kind of a good opportunity to sum up where we've been and get a big picture of what it was that Peter was trying to communicate to his people about how we believers play this game of life. Peter starts out speaking about the privilege that we have, the privilege of being called out of darkness into God's wonderful light and that God himself is building this brand-new temple and it's not out of dead stones of marble or wood

but out of living stones which represent the very lives of the people that he's called out of darkness. Peter told us quite clearly that the cornerstone of that building has to be Jesus Christ and that for believers, it is Christ who orients our path as that cornerstone, but for non-believers that very same cornerstone has become a stumbling block, a rock of offense. And we spent a good deal of time going over just how offensive the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is and what a scandal that Christ represents and the privilege we have of growing such beautiful lives that the world can't help but see Christ within. We spoke about the power of submission in dealing with spiritual enemies and understanding this unique power that God expects us to grow and develop, that's the power of love over the power of power itself. And we saw that if any group had the opportunity to demonstrate the power of love, it was that group that Peter was writing to. I mean all of Peter's epistles, as you probably well know, they all take place against the backdrop of intense persecution and suffering that was the lot of Peter's people. They recognized the incredible privilege they had been given while they were in the midst of incredible pain and suffering, and it was the ability to recognize that being in the kingdom of God necessitates carrying a cross that gave them the ability to stand against such incredible personal attacks.

Well now the context in which you and I receive the gospel differs

wildly from that of Peter's day. Instead of persecution, we have privilege. Instead of poverty, we have wealth. Instead of sickness and disease, we have cradle to grave insurance with insurance to cover just about any contingency. Almost all of the things that Peter's people were missing we have and we have it in abundance. And it's just that abundance that can skewer our perspective. See, Peter never shortchanged or disguised the difficulty and the struggle that being a believer in Christ entailed. In fact he stated on more than one occasion that pain and struggle were completely normative for believers. *1 Peter 4:12* says: *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* See, Peter's people were trained, they were equipped, they were prepared to suffer for Christ and kingdom. It was part of their understanding of the gospel. I don't know if it's part of our understanding.

What I want to address this morning is this notion that I think that many people in the Christian community have bought into is that somehow you come to Jesus to find happiness, that you come to Jesus to find the solutions to all of your problems and all of your pain. If you have been following where we have been these last few

months and especially where Peter's people have been, you're bound to know that Peter's congregation probably experienced far more problems, far more pain, far more persecution after coming to know Jesus than they had ever experienced before. And as I look around, I see an awful lot of promises made that the Christian life is going to provide you with a life that the people in Peter's day never saw. My concern is that people completely understand what Christ is really offering in the gospel.

Ray Comfort of The Way of the Master understands quite well just how dangerous it is to think of coming to Christ as some kind of guarantee of a trouble-free life of happiness. He looks around at those that he knows that he's ministered to and he sees a far different story, and in his book *God Has a Wonderful Plan For Your Life: The Myth of the Modern Message*, he says this, he says:

"This makes no sense. The preacher promises a bed of roses for those who come to Christ, but those who are in Christ are evidently sitting on a painful bed of thorns. He assures a smooth flight, but those who are already on board are suffering terrible turbulence -- and no one seems to notice the paradox. Let me tell you about a few of my Christian friends who live in the real world. One went with his wife to a meeting. Their teenage son drove there alone. On the way home, my friend came across an accident, so he

stopped to help. When he looked in the vehicle, he saw his beloved teenage son, dead, impaled on the steering wheel. A senior pastor of a church where I was on staff was roused from his bed at three o'clock one morning to counsel a man who had come to his door and was waiting in the living room. As the pastor stepped into the room, the man began to slash him with a machete. The pastor almost died, and was irrevocably scarred both physically and mentally, so much so that he was unable to minister and required 24-hour care. Another pastor friend learned that his wife had multiple sclerosis. Her crippling disease left him as the only one in the family able to take care of their three young boys. Then he was diagnosed with cancer. His wife died after struggling with her disease for many years. One of my friends, a graphic artist, married a woman whose Christian husband had died of cancer, leaving her to rear five kids. The marriage seemed fine until she ran off with another man. She left my friend with the one child that was his. Some time after that, someone broke into his home and beat him to a pulp. He had to be rushed to the emergency room for treatment. On June 19, 2000, five trainees with New Tribes Mission pitched a tent during a violent storm in Mississippi. Jenny Knapp, an attractive twenty-year-old noticed that the rain was causing the roof to cave in, so she lifted the tent pole to raise the height of the roof. Suddenly a bolt of lightning struck the pole and tore through her body, giving her second-degree burns on her face, arm, and back. Her

friends resuscitated her lifeless body and rushed her to the hospital where she was placed in the intensive care unit. The young missionary recovered, but she is terribly scarred and partially blind. It is a sad fact of life, but in the real world, lightning strikes the just and the unjust. At least one church I know of may have noticed the paradox. They were called 'The Happy Church,' but recently decided, for some reason, to change their name."

It's tempting to hear of such things and just try to take God and sovereignty just right out of the picture. I mean we know that God ordains all things and we know that that means all things and that makes God responsible for even the bad things because he allows them. But as hard as that is to grapple with, the alternative view is even worse.

I once heard of a story of, I've repeated it before, about a funeral being preached for an evangelist and his son who were killed in a plane crash. The pastor was trying to comfort his people by saying: "One thing we know for certain, we know that God had absolutely nothing to do with this awful tragedy." And the person recounting the story, I think it was Jerry Bridges, I'm not sure, he instantly thought of the scripture in *Matthew 10:29* which says: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them*

*will fall to the ground apart from your Father."* And as he's hearing this, he says to himself how can it be that the same God who claims that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground apart from his sovereign will could somehow manage to miss a plane that's crashing? You see it's very hard to accept that a sovereign, all-powerful God would allow bad things to happen, especially to his people. But it's harder still to accept a God whose own weakness makes him unable to do anything at all.

Many years ago I used to rail against a very popular biblical tract. It was called "Four Spiritual Laws." The opening law of those four spiritual laws was this statement that I thought horribly mangled what the gospel was trying to say. The statement was: "God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life." Have you ever heard that? Everybody's heard that. My first complaint was not with the statement's content but with its address. You see it was sold wholesale to anyone who would listen, and personally I never have and I never will accept that statement as a general truth applicable to all of mankind because it flies in the face of literally mountains of scripture that warn mankind that they are all under the just judgment of a holy God. But that phrase is gloriously and absolutely true for those who cling to the cross of Jesus Christ. God does love you and he does have a perfect plan for your life. It's just that our 21st century understanding of

what that "perfect life" is and God's understanding are probably extraordinarily different.

Now over the last couple of months we've been watching the plan unfold in Peter's epistle. In chapter 2, verse 9 we read: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* I think most of us can vividly recall the individual darkness that we were called out of, and I think many of us are still rubbing our eyes trying to comprehend what it means to be called into his wonderful light. We have also looked at the Holy Spirit's command in verse 12 which says: *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* We've been looking at that verse and we looked at the crucial role the fruit of the Spirit has had in living that kind of life and we also looked at reproofs and rebukes as part of the discipline that God uses to produce that beautiful life but now we want to shift gears a little bit. We're looking at how Christians prepare themselves internally for playing this game of life. We've been concentrating on the internal forces of the Holy Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Now we want to look at the outward ways that we express those inward qualities. We want to see practically how God wants us to play the game of life. So I want to re-read this section that we've been looking at these last few weeks.

This is 1 Peter 2:13-25. He says: *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: Whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their*

*insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

I think the first thing we get when we read this passage is that the game of life that Peter is speaking about here is unlike any other game you've ever played. I mean the rules are vastly different and we might not understand what the point of the game really is because after telling us what a glorious heritage we have, Peter begins to flesh out how we are to manifest it in the world but the words he chooses, they don't sound glorious at all. I mean he uses words like "submission" and "slavery" and "sufferings" and "beatings" and "pain." They're all parts of this game. Most of us want no part of it. We wind up thinking something's gone wrong either with God's love for us or for his so-called perfect plan for our lives when it's neither his love or his plan that is off but instead it's our understanding of how we're supposed to play the game.

I want you to just imagine the reaction that Peter's letter had when they read in verse 17 that they were to fear God, honor the

emperor. Honor the emperor. I mean the emperor at that time was the infamous Nero, and I've mentioned some things that he was famous for, and just to flesh out his illustrious career a little bit more, he became emperor in 54 A.D. and to consolidate his power, he poisoned his brother-in-law, he murdered his mother and had his wife killed. Encyclopaedia Britannica says of this man: "He is remembered most for his mistreatment of Christians and his neglect of government affairs while he pursued a musical career." This was a very, very bad man and yet the Holy Spirit says honor him. He tells us in verse 13 to submit ourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men. I mean we look at the authorities instituted in our political system, we see very little to honor. Perhaps we start to wonder what God's game plan is all about. You see, this is no small problem understanding God's game plan. In fact I believe the key to successful Christian living is understanding that God does indeed love you and that he does indeed have a perfect plan for your life even when circumstances point in the opposite direction. Simply knowing that God is sovereignly guiding every event in your life can be life-changing.

I've mentioned Joni Eareckson's analogy for a number of times but it bears repeating. Most of you know Joni Eareckson was paralyzed from the neck down in a swimming accident, that for almost fifty

years now she's been in a wheelchair. She illustrates the importance of knowing that God is guiding your life with this analogy. She says: Say that you've been given detailed instructions to a destination along with a hundred-pound weight that you are required to carry. She says you don't know where you're going and you don't know why; you just know that you have to do it. And so after carrying this weight for a short while, your body begins to ache, your lungs start to burn, you're tempted to give up because you can't see the point. She says: Now take the very same situation and instead of it being an unknown destination and an unknown weight to bear, you're told the weight is actually your severely injured child and your destination is the only emergency room that's equipped to handle it. Well, your lungs may still burn and your legs may still ache and your back may still be killing you but that no longer matters, and the reason is because you know why you're running. That's why the "why" answer makes all the difference in the world. Well, the same is true with God's plan for your life. Once you know the why, everything changes. Now I surely can't give you all the whys for your life because I don't know that but I can tell you some of the whys that undergird God's plan for our lives. And to do that I want to go back to another game that has a similar game plan and the game is near and dear to my heart. It's the game of football, because in some ways football is very similar to the kingdom of God. See, football is a

game about territory. Each team has half of the field and the goal is to advance your team into your opponent's territory. The ultimate goal is to get your team through your opponent's territory and into his end zone to score points. The team on offense gets four plays to advance ten yards out of their territory and into their opponent's territory and if it succeeds, it gets another set of four plays or downs. Then the idea is to continue to advance through your opponent's territory by going at least ten yards in each set of four downs, and of course if you do that, eventually you will get to your opponent's end zone and score. Now the whole point of football is to capture more and more of the opponent's territory until you finally enter his end zone. Well it just so happens that's exactly the point of our Christian walk. You see, we are here to capture enemy territory. It was our father Adam who turned over the entire kingdom to the enemy. And ever since then God has been slowly and methodically taking it back, not by might, not by power, but through his Spirit working through his people, the church. If you lose sight of that vision, if you lose sight of that goal, then the Christian walk becomes just a set of meaningless directions and the burden becomes a dead weight just hanging off your back. If you truly capture that vision, you know one of the key "why" answers to God's plan for your life. You see, it's not about comfort or health or wealth or even happiness, it's all about the glory of God. It's about territory reclaimed and the

kingdom advanced.

There's an amazing scripture in *Matthew 11*, it says this, it says: "*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.*" The kingdom advances by capturing territories. And in some ways it's exactly like football. You know, one interesting thing about football is the strategy involved, I mean, basically you've got four plays to gain ten yards. Well sometimes a coach will use one or two of those plays not to gain territory but to set up his opponents for a future play. He'll run one or two plays that appear to go nowhere or maybe even lose yards just so that he can exploit a weakness later on. And he'll use those plays to get his opponents to take chances, to get his opponents to make mistakes that he'll exploit later. Now the player who's playing the game, he loses sight of the coach's game plan might wonder, he might complain that he's going nowhere or even backwards. He might focus on the pain, he might focus on the setbacks, he might focus on the losses, he may begin to lose his understanding that it's not about comfort or pain or setbacks or losses, it's about conquering territory. Individually the player may take a pounding. He may appear to go nowhere and if he's truly a player, he's going to do simply what he's told. So it is with us. There's lots of times when God's perfect plan for our life is mystifying, it's maddening

and it's highly counterintuitive and worse still God seems to be absolutely silent. And our first response is to get out of the game at the exact moment that we need to trust in two very basic things: Number one, that God truly does love us; and number two, that he truly does have a plan for our lives. And the difference is that God looks at our lives from eternity's perspective while we look at from the 80-odd years that we kind of figure we're entitled to. We lose sight of the game plan and we interpret our trial and struggle as God's abandonment, as God's punishment.

You know, I remember as a child thinking one of the worse things my dad ever did to us, to myself and my two brothers, was to take us to the doctor's to get our polio shots; not once, not twice, but three times. This I know is completely dating me, but back, back in the Pleistocene age you had to get polio shots. My dad warned us that we were going to get these shots and three separate times we thought he was being unusually cruel and that he was going to subject us to torture. See, my dad made the decision to accept for us the short term pain of a needle in order to provide the long term gain of protection from a devastating disease. But that never occurred it my seven-year-old brain. You see, as I recall, dad didn't care, he just was going to send us to be tortured. Well, what if God is making decisions about you and me right now that are mystifying, like my dad's decision, but with eternal consequences

that will have ramifications not just for the future of this life but for the future of our eternity. I mean, after all, God knows that we're going to be a live, thinking part of his creation 500,000 years from now. What if some of the difficult decisions that God makes in the short term for us here and now are like my dad's decision to give us polio shots? What if they are short term pains designed to benefit us for the long term centuries from now?

Paul makes the statement about the trials and struggles in his life, which were many. After all, how many people do you know that complained that there were flogged, they were beaten, they were tortured, they were stoned, they were shipwrecked, they were betrayed, naked, hungry and completely alone? Add to that the fact that Paul's life ended with him being beheaded. And yet it was Paul himself who said this about God's perspective on his life. He said: *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

Now to go back to the football analogy, consider that some of our light and momentary troubles may well be associated with God using us to gain some territory in this game with a game plan that may mystify us. So the question for us becomes: Are we willing to trust the coach? Some folks, perhaps I should say many folks, decide the best place to be in this game is somewhere on the bench.

I mean it's the place where there's minimum pain but there's minimum gain. Some folks' entire Christian walk is to literally sit the bench, I mean, they actually think the Christian walk is you go to church, you sing some songs, you listen to some preaching and you go home and repeat next week. If that's what your life consists of, you just don't understand the game. Remember it was Peter who told us that we are a chosen royal priesthood. And the question is chosen for what? The answer is to play this game, to capture what the enemy has claimed as his own. And the difference is we have to play this game by God's rules and not ours. See, in football you defeat your opponent by out-powering him and outlasting him. In this game you defeat your opponent by out-loving them. That's the impossible part. The enemy has lies, he has power, he has deceit, and we have the word of truth, we have submission, we have denial of self but we also have the ultimate weapon and that is the cross.

Well, this is us, this is God telling us this is your role. He says: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* God says that's us and this is Christ, *Colossians 2: He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.* And you know how the Lord

triumphed over them, he did it by dying, by hanging stripped, beaten and powerless on a cross. He took on the sins of the world so that we by faith could have our sins paid for. And you know what the game is all about? It's about joining him right there on our own cross. I've said it many times in the last few weeks: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

I was just mentioning before how the kingdom of God forcibly advances and I just want to revisit that statement, expand it a little bit in that section of scripture. Again, this is back in *Matthew 11*. Listen to what Jesus says here, he says: *"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* Now Jesus is very clear that among every single person born of a woman, no one, no one was greater than John the Baptist. Jesus is also clear that John was the Elijah to come. I mean there was no one who more forcibly advanced the kingdom than John. Where did John wind up? I mean, he wound up rotting away in a dungeon. That

was part of the game plan, but for a while he lost the game plan. In fact in *Matthew 11:2* it says this: "*Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'*" Clearly this is not what John anticipated. Understandably John clearly doubted. He never imagined his life would end this way. And we knew from there it went from bad to worse. I mean he wound up having his head chopped off and served on a platter as a party treat for the king's guests. Was that God's perfect plan for John's life? Was that God's plan for the one who Jesus has said: "*Among those born of woman there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist,*" and the answer to that is yes, yes, absolutely yes. The only way that John's death is going to make sense is within the context of the cross. You see, in Christ you win by losing, you live by dying. You find yourself only by losing yourself for his sake.

And the question we're asking this morning is: To what have we been called? To comfort? Happiness? Health? Wealth? Or the cross? You might ask are they mutually exclusive, I mean, is it impossible to have both? Well, the fact is many if not most of us already have both. The question is: To which do we cling? I mean how do I know that I am truly trusting in God and not simply bartering with him? Okay, God, I'll give you obedience and service

as long as you give me comfort, happiness, health and wealth. I'll play the game as long as I'm winning, as long as your perfect plan still looks perfect to me. But how do I test that? Well, the answer to that one is absolutely simple. How do I respond when he sends me the cross? When my life is not working? And the game plan is all wrong? How do I handle that? Well, could I suggest something? A piece of advice from the Master himself who left himself as an example that we should follow in his steps. Again you've heard me say this many times over the last few months: *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* I mean there's a reason why I quote that scripture so often. See, you know to what the key -- you know what the key to playing this game is all about when you're a dad who's just seen his teenage son impaled on a steering wheel, when you've been attacked with a machete by someone you're seeking to help, when death, disease and heartache stalk you in spite of your good intentions. What is it that will give you the ability to still be able to stay in the game? It's the ability to entrust yourself to him who judges justly, to the one who promises everything is going to even out in the end.

There's only two categories of Christians that I know of. There

are those who are bearing their crosses and there are those who are going to. I mean Jesus said: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* Because that's the game plan. That's how the kingdom advances. We out-love the world by dying to it and for it. And the only way we can ever do that consistently is to do what our master did, when they hurled their insults, he didn't retaliate; when he suffered, he didn't threaten, instead he trusted. He placed his life in the hands of him who judges everything in perfect justice.

Now perhaps you're feeling the weight of the cross today. It may be sickness, it may be suffering, it may be insults and you're wondering whose perfect plan am I living by? Well, God tells us unequivocally that for some of us, his perfect plan might include some perfectly awful circumstances. Listen to what he wrote in *Hebrews 11*. He said: *There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated -- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground, these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had*

*been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*

Please hear what God is trying to tell us. He's describing wonderful believers, wonderful Christian believers, believers who God himself says this world was not worthy of. These same people were jeered and flogged and chained and imprisoned and those are just the ones who were left alive. God says other wonderful believers of whom this world is not worthy were sawn in two or slaughtered by swords as they wandered about destitute, persecuted and mistreated in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground. Does that sound like something you want to sell to others as a solution to all your problems? God didn't tell these precious saints that all their problems were going to go away, that happiness in this life would be theirs as long as they came to Christ. Instead God told them that he has planned something better, something better for those who, for Christ's sake, were willing to undergo abysmal treatment. That may not sound like much to some but it's an awful lot to those who are willing to trust, for those who believe that our light momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So how did people under those circumstances survive that kind of treatment? They entrusted themselves to the God of the universe

whose sovereign control guaranteed them, as it guarantees us, that they would be judged justly. Can you entrust yourself to the one who judges justly? Can you trust the love of a God who would send you to a cross? He sent one to John the Baptist who by Jesus's own words was the greatest among those born of women. He sent one to Peter who wrote our epistle who was crucified upside down. He sent one to all the disciples, all of whom endured a martyr's death with the exception of John, and he sent one to his only begotten Son. I mean is it at all surprising or shocking that at one time or another he might just send one to you? Peter says: *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* You see, the fact is God does love us and he does have a perfect plan for our lives. It is a plan with a cross at its center and understand, God is not saying, hey, I got bad news for you, it's the cross. In fact he's saying just the opposite. He says rejoice, rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. Something is going on. Something that will pay enormous later dividends.

You see, God's got a perfect plan all right. It is we who resist it because it's not at all what we bargained for. The cross is our

game plan. The cross is God's way to advance his kingdom and he tells us to rejoice in it. Quite frankly, I don't know any earthly way how to do that. In fact the only way that I can make that make sense is to do the one thing that I know pleases God. I simply entrust myself to him who judges justly. I just trust and obey. That's how the game is played. *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* Let's pray.

*Father, we want to play the game the way you have set it up. We want to play the game so that we can recapture territory that Adam gave away. And Lord, we recognize that oftentimes the game plan is mystifying, frightening, bewildering, but Lord, you have loaded your word with examples of others who have gone before us and have suffered the same bewilderment, from John the Baptist through the apostles to your own Son. I thank you, Lord, that there is a game plan. I thank you that we can focus on you and the trust that took place within you and know that it pleases you and advances your kingdom. And I thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.*