

## foreword

**G**ROWING UP IN PANAMA, I DREAMED OF PLAYING PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL THOUGH the odds were stacked against me. My first “glove” was made from cardboard.

When I was twenty years old, word spread that a scout from the New York Yankees was coming to Panama. He was not coming to see me; the Yankees had never heard of me. A friend encouraged me to tryout, and I did. The scout liked what he saw, and eventually I was drafted by the Yankees. Today, I am overwhelmingly grateful for the opportunity I have had to fulfill the dream of playing the sport I love.

The light of my faith brings everything into perspective. The visit from the scout was not something I had planned or expected. This is one of the reasons for my testimony that every step of my life has been ordered by my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore everything I have accomplished I owe to him.

I sense in *Steal Away* a familiar passion both for baseball and for following Christ. Hugh Poland provides readers with interesting and little known facts and stories about many of the “heroes” of the game—past and present. His purpose, however, is to help readers grow in their understanding of and commitment to Jesus Christ. I hope and believe that his words will bless you and draw you nearer to Jesus, the greatest hero of all time. —**Mariano Rivera**

## **preface**

**B**ASEBALL IS NEVER MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPTURES, THOSE HAVING BEEN WRITTEN long before the Cartwrights and Spaldings and others known only to God helped evolve the game. But baseball is story, and as such it has much in common with Jesus' teaching method. Jesus taught in parables, imaginative stories of commonplace events that were filled with wonderful truth.

The word *parable* comes from the Greek, meaning "to cast alongside of." Imagine tossing a simple story next to a big idea. The interaction between the two is what parables are about. Following the pattern of Jewish teachers of the day, Jesus used parables to teach truths, especially truths of the kingdom of God. In essence Jesus was saying, "So you think you know what the kingdom is like? Listen to this story and then see what you think." In a sense Jesus was playing a game of catch with his audiences—"See if you can catch this one"—and challenging them to think differently, to conceive of old ideas in new ways.

I don't remember when I first noticed the game of baseball. I do remember my first pack of baseball cards, my first home run over the fence in the backyard, my first uniform, and the first major-league game I ever attended. I also

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remember that I placed my faith in Christ at the tender age of nine, and I knew that God loved me and would never leave me.

But it took twenty more years for me to begin to see the parables in the game that speak so strongly of redemption, of justice, of hope and forgiveness, of faithfulness and perseverance. Perhaps that is because I live in such a busy age. There is little time for doubleheaders anymore. I find myself shunning the “businessperson’s special” afternoon game so I can get a little more work done. This may not fall into the category of breaking the Ten Commandments, but does it really do my soul any good to work harder while life is rapidly passing by?

When we are too busy for God, we are busier than God wants us to be. The purpose of this book is to help the reader “steal away” to God by recounting stories from the greatest game ever played and making connections with scriptural truths. The Bible is a dangerous book—if you read it, it will change your life. Combined with prayer, even the busiest fan will find his or her heart growing warm toward the things of God as the long winter melts into spring and we hear those magical words again: “Pitchers and catchers report . . .”

Like baseball, writing is a team sport. Of the current and former players, players’ wives, coaches, and umpires I interviewed, many were especially helpful, including Sal Bando, Betty Barbary, Ted Barrett, John Boccabella, Bernie Carbo, Alvin Dark, Tom Griffin, Randy Harling, Ed Herrmann, Frank Minton, and Jim Sundberg. I also have to thank a dear friend, Dale Seibert. From the

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moment I met him, he was retelling old baseball stories and bolstering me with the greatest encouragement in Christ a friend could ever have.

All first-time authors should have editors like Randy Frame and Cassandra Williams of Judson Press. They have both encouraged me to swing for the fences.

My wife, Karen, and my three daughters, Kayse, Jayme, and Ally, have endured a lot of evenings having Dad at the computer or at the library. I have no greater joy than to know that my bases are loaded and that Jesus has done what it takes to make sure you all will arrive safely home someday.

C'mon, let's play catch. . . .