

SPRING TRAINING

You may be familiar with the verse from 2 Samuel 11:1, "In the spring, when kings go off to war, David sent Joab, along with his servants and all the Israelites...."

Spring training is not quite like that, but it is the time of the year when young baseball warriors, like those of the Texas Rangers, go to Surprise, Arizona. This year it begins on February 27 and each of the 30 Major League Clubs will be in action in the so-called Cactus and Grapefruit League games.

There will be "seasoned veterans" and "young wannabes" who will spend over a month shedding winter fat, loosening muscles, treating sore arms, reviewing the basics, and playing exhibition games, all with the hope of ending up on the major league roster of a team. This will be a time to reacquaint themselves with the fundamentals of the game.

In the spring there is not too much concern over which team has the best record. The real test will come in the months that follow. Nevertheless, during spring training even veteran players are reminded of the basic rules of the game, theoretical and real game situations, and will end up in the minor leagues if they don't perform well.

But why should old-timers need to be reminded about the nitty-gritty of a game they have played most of their lives? Obviously, because they need real practice in order for the essentials of baseball to become automatic responses—they won't even have to "think" about what to do in any game situation.

As Christians we may also need "spring training," reminders about the basics of our faith, so that we respond automatically with love and forgiveness when someone offends us. We need to *"fill our minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise; things that are true, noble, right pure, lovely, and honorable"* (Philippians 4:8). We want our thoughts and reactions to be automatic in a way that pleases God.

It is therefore good to review regularly what we believe and why: The Apostle's Creed is designed to help us and a good place to start. But we can also examine other fundamentals: confessing our sins, praying for forgiveness, asking the Holy Spirit to use the gifts he has given us, and so on.

Checking our core beliefs is also something like "spring cleaning," a habit that older people can relate to. It was a time, in the spring of the year and after a long winter's nap, when people sorted through their accumulated belongings (sometimes referred to as "junk") to eliminate as much of it as they could.

It was also a time to clean the house, beat the rugs, wash the windows and just “feel clean.” Some trace the origin of spring cleaning to the Persian new year, which falls on the first day of spring. Traditionally people cleaned their house either right before or during the first week of Great Lent, which was referred to as Clean Week.

Paul uses the metaphor of a house to refer to our body, so it would not be out of place to give it a good spring cleaning. We might then have a “spring in our step” and feel energetic enough to clean out the attic (our mind) as well.

Growing up on our family farm, I knew that spring was “in the air” when I could smell the meadow grasses and hear the streams running again. It was time to get my baseball mitt and rub some Neatsfoot Oil on it to loosen up the leather. (An aside—I read that Neatsfoot oil was used to keep horses healthy in some way, perhaps softening their hide.) When I thought that my baseball glove was flexible enough, I was ready to “spring into action.”

I can’t do that now because I am no “spring chicken,” but I still get “spring fever.”

Karl Franklin
Warming up for the Big Game