



ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

Out of the Ballpark, **Into the Game**

I was born in 1961 and raised in Alameda, Calif., the only child of a loving, single mother. Mom worked two jobs to support us and to otherwise provide me with every possible advantage she could arrange. Nevertheless, I was a “latchkey kid” before the term was coined. At 7 a.m. each weekday, my mother would leave for work in San Francisco, and I wouldn’t see her again until 5:30 p.m. After dinner, we would sell Avon door-to-door in our community. At an early age, I learned from her the value of hard work. From her I also learned that while man looks on the outward appearance, God sees the heart.

My mother raised me as a Catholic, and we attended Mass each Sunday at a time when the priest still spoke Latin. In 1972 we moved to Phoenix, where I soon became an altar boy, attended parochial school and, later, was a Jesuit college preparatory student on a work-scholarship program. As you might imagine, this school was filled with some of the most economically privileged students in the city. On the other hand, I shared a one-bedroom apartment with my mother until my senior year.

In high school, I excelled at baseball and was entertaining college scholarship offers by my senior year—an envisioned future threatened only by my involvement with drugs. Marijuana soon led to the use of cocaine, too, but ironically, I refused to smoke a cigarette. I’d say to my friends, “Dude, cigarettes will kill you!” It was an indication that I was losing brain cells, a sign I needed help.

*“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”
Psalm 139:14*

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Playing baseball as a freshman at Arizona’s Mesa Community College, I met athletes for the first time who not only talked of Christ, but who walked with Him. Soon, I began to attend a Bible study for college students led by a former football player, someone I could relate to and

respect. Still, I was only a seeker.

He would ask, “Are you a Christian?”

“Yeah, man,” I’d reply. “I’m Catholic.”

As a freshman at Mesa, I would often snort lines of cocaine with a couple of guys before practice, but inside I longed to be different, better. I thought, *if only I can get to the major leagues, life will be different.* What I saw in the summer of 1980, however, showed me that it was actually far worse.

That summer, just before my sophomore year in college, I lived with a major league baseball player and his wife. I was a nanny of sorts, taking care of their kids, though I was treated more like one of the family. I’d hang out at the ballpark, in the locker room, with the players on and off the field. That’s how I came to discover that many of these men were

no different than me. They were lost, empty, striving for significance and feeling insecure. Sadly, vast amounts of time and treasure allowed them to satisfy their unhealthy pleasures. I saw men and families ruined.

By the end of that summer, my god of baseball came crashing down. I felt like there was nothing left to live for, and I tried to escape by overdosing on drugs. I saw hell; I looked into the Devil’s eyes; I heard God say, “Live for me or I’ll kill you.” Really. Mercy and wrath, both conveyed in the same breath.

Somehow, I chose life, and 31 years later, I’m still amazed by His grace.

Today, I lead a multiethnic, economically diverse congregation of sinners, seekers and saints. No doubt, I do so in light of who I am and from where I’ve come. Perhaps, too, this is why I so passionately promote the vision of local churches reflecting God’s love for all people and not just a privileged few.

Mark DeYmaz is the founding pastor of Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas (MosaicChurch.net) and executive director of the Mosaic Global Network. His latest e-book, Should Pastors Accept or Reject the Homogeneous Unit Principle? features more than 40 interactive enhancements including videos, downloads and links, and is available at Mosaic.info/store.

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