

# Here Where Dogs Bite and Bees Sting: Part Three

## **When All Things Are Made New**

It has been said God is not doing anything about evil in nature or humankind in any of its forms, therefore, He must be either evil or powerless. God is doing something about all forms of evil. All of history has been His work against evil. First, He'll deal with the troublemakers who started it all. Namely, us. Paul says "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18a). If that is the case, which it is, we are all in lot of trouble "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

But there is hope for us because although we don't deserve it, God loves us dearly and will do He anything He can to save us. Paul says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God fully acknowledged that "the wages of sin is death," but in His stupendous grace, he took the penalty for us. He came down as the God-man Jesus Christ to suffer and die, experiencing disgrace and death in order that we might be able to choose the gift of "eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The judgment, therefore, will be the final act of God's purging the earth of sinful man. Our path rests on another choice that will literally change our world forever: To accept Jesus' death and resurrection or to reject it. This path of acceptance is simple. Dr. Robert Picirill names four basic things we must accept in order to be saved: 1.) We cannot save ourselves. 2.) We can only be justified by obedience in Jesus Christ. 3.) It is completely free for all. 4.) Justification is through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ (The Book

of Romans, 58-60).

This path means a full acknowledgment that God is a completely perfect God and that our disobedience means we deserve His wrath. It means accepting that this God of perfect wrath is also a God of perfect, supreme goodness. We, as Christians, must accept both of these aspects of God. C.S. Lewis made this easy to understand. He was a master at making complex, theological concepts like this easy enough for anyone to understand. He embodied this skill in his famous children's fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In his book *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, God is represented by the lion Aslan. Before coming face to face with him, Lucy and her siblings have a conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver concerning this God-figure:

"...said Mrs. Beaver, 'if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you" (*The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 80).

We can be assured of this: Like Aslan, God is thoroughly good but He is not safe. He is perfectly good, but He is also a God of perfect holy wrath. He is not a feeble, spoiling grandfather figure; He's a perfect Lord. This perfect Lordship means He is all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving, and completely just all at the same time. All of this culminates in His thorough grace. The appearance of this grace is sometimes fearsome to behold. Sometimes it may even appear evil to us. But what may appear so is His way of battling the true evil forces of darkness. Sometimes our finite minds may not see an end of all that we see as evil (whether or not it really is), but our hope must always be in Him. Always. This is true regardless of what happens in this life. Piccirilli says:

“...we cannot always understand God’s ways. They are too wonderful for us. We are assured he controls history so as to make mercy available to all in the most opportune way, but we cannot see this in our limited understanding of the changing historical scenes. We have to accept God at His word” (Book of Romans, 236).

While God is in this process of bringing true evil to damnation, He is using it to accomplish His ends. But rest assured it will end. Revelation 21 says that God’s plan will culminate in a brand-new heaven and brand-new earth with all of the many imperfections of this universe completely wiped away. In this chapter, John tells us that in this new kingdom tears and death will be completely non-existent. This is coming. I am convinced of it. But if we want to have any chance at all of living in this renewed universe, we must first accept the gift of eternal life through Jesus the Son of God. We must fully accept Him as the Lord and Savior of our lives. When we do this, our lives are renewed right now in the inner man. But this renewed man will continue in a world that has not yet been renewed. We will continue to get hurt, get old, die, and be tempted to sin. Until that time when all things are made new again, we must persevere with full faith on and in full service of God here where dogs bite and bees sting.

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## **Here Where Dogs Bite and Bees Sting: Part Two**

**How the Corruption of Free Will Has Affected Nature**

In the [first part](#) of this three-part series, I talked about

how we corrupted God's gift of free will by choosing to sin, to turn away from Him. This began the history of the curse of sin. One of the results of the curse of sin is that all of nature is now imperfect. Much to our chagrin, everything is now dying. And as I mentioned in Part One, many of us see this as all God's fault.

C.S. Lewis tells about the death of his mother, a turning point in his early life. He recalls praying for a miraculous resurrection. When none of this took place, he completely rejected that there could possibly be a good God.

An older Lewis conceded that the subject is much more complicated than he had thought as a young man. In *Mere Christianity*, he wondered "...How had I got this idea of just and unjust?...(*Mere Christianity*, 40). What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" It is this thought that convicted Lewis of the over-simplicity of his atheistic beliefs. A little further on in *Mere Christianity* he says it is also an oversimplification to say, yes, there is a good God in heaven and that God has made it so everything is all right.

Evil does exist in both man and nature and God obviously doesn't quell all of it. It is not that it is too powerful for God or even that it is equal with Him. It is not like there is not an equal, dualistic battle where good and evil do perpetual battle with one another with evil continually limiting God. The story of Scripture shows that the evil forces of darkness are a much lesser thing which God is in the process of conquering. But Scripture also makes it clear that evil is still exceedingly powerful. And it is this exceedingly powerful thing that has infected both man and nature.

### **Pain is a Grace**

As far as the natural, physical order, I don't think pain and suffering are the main culprits. Pain and suffering may be

unpleasant but they aren't evil things in and of themselves. They are indicators that something evil is happening. In fact, when you experience pain you are often experiencing a sort of gift. In *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Philip Yancey describes "The Gift Nobody Wants" first thing. He says, "pain gets bad press...we should see poems, statues and hymns to pain." He says, "Pain is not an afterthought, or God's great goof...it reveals a marvelous design that serves our bodies well." He tells how his close friend Paul Brand, a doctor at a leper clinic, observed firsthand that without being able to feel pain lepers are unable to detect when evil is happening to their bodies and therefore do not know to do something about it. This is the major reason for many of the injuries incurred by leprosy (*Where is God When It Hurts?* 26-31).

### **And Our Suffering is Not Divine Punishment**

The imperfection in nature that instigates the pain is sometimes seen as a punishment from God. Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* while watching his own son die of a very rare disease. Many of the conclusions found in the book are probably wrong, but he does provide some good insights. For instance, Kushner relates going to the home of a couple who had just lost a child. When he arrived at their home the very first words out of their mouth were, "You know, Rabbi, we didn't fast last Yom Kippur" (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 8). In their opinion, they were only getting from God what they deserved. They believed that God was punishing them for doing what they were supposed to do.

The story of Job and his friends probably came to mind when I was talking about viewing suffering as a punishment for a sin, didn't it? They (the "friends") certainly said a lot of interesting, thought-provoking things, but they were just saying the same wrong things over and over again. They would have us believe that when we hurt, we really are being punished for some sin. That really has nothing to do with it

as far as we are concerned. We feel pain at all because we live in an imperfect world. It's as simple as that.

### **Living Your Faith in This World That Hurts**

The trick is not allowing the existence of imperfection of the natural order to play a decisive role in our personal level of faith. That is, our faith in and on God should not lower or become non-existent when something bad or even a bunch of bad somethings takes place in our lives. Job was faithful to God despite a bunch of really bad somethings coming into his life in an apparently brief amount of time. That is not to say he never expressed anger and frustration at what God was doing to him. He did. That is not to say he did not often demand an answer from God. He did that too. His level of faith on God simply did not depend on life being good. Throughout the book, Job makes it very clear that he wasn't a masochist who enjoyed the pain, but he also made it clear that he was fully willing to accept that both good and evil came into the lives of those who love God.

God, the one friend who knew what He was talking about, made a huge statement of His amazing knowledge and sovereignty in the last three chapters of Job. His words here reveal a God that is very opposite the weak God claimed by so many. One of these individuals is the aforementioned Kushner. I mentioned that Kushner comes to several wrong conclusions in his book. Here's one of them: Toward the end of his book he concludes that God "is limited in what he can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom" (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 134). Yancey comments on this statement by Kushner in *Where is God When It Hurts*: "God's speech at the end of Job is one of the...reasons I cannot agree...Job 38-41 contains as impressive a description of God's power as you'll find anywhere in the Bible." God is not limited by evil, by our free will, by anything. But we are. We are limited by many things. And in our limited understanding, we assume that He really is limited. In so doing we make the

God of our hearts and minds a weak God.

## **The Unpleasant Providence**

No, God does not punish us by inflicting disease and hardship upon us but uses these things to reveal His glory. Upon first seeing a blind man, the disciples asked Jesus, who sinned to make this man blind, the man himself or his parents? Jesus replied that neither had sinned but that the man had been born blind so that God's glory could be displayed. He then proceeded to manifest the glory of God by miraculously healing the man. Other people who have experienced bitter providence come to mind.

I think of Carolyn Martin. Carolyn is a friend of my family who was born with severe Cerebral Palsy. Martin spent much of her early life seeking to find meaning out of her lot in life. Despite being a church-going person for most of her life, it was only as an adult she found the joy in God that gave her true meaning. In her words: "My pain was washed away by God's deep and soothing sea of love for me" (*I Can't Walk So I'll Learn to Dance*, 239). She came to see that God was using her handicap for His glory. She was able to get a college education and to thereafter become a published writer, inspiring others with physical limitations through her story. Her story is a message of God's grace.

I think of Richard Wurmbrand. It was as a religious prisoner under communist guard that pastor Wurmbrand saw the true face of evil. The tortures he endured and witnessed are too horrible to contemplate. He recounted how he heard one of his torturers say, "I thank God, in whom I don't believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart."<sup>33</sup> His story is a story of God's providence. After his final release, Wurmbrand spread his story throughout the world and started *Voice of the Martyrs*. His story has become an inspiration to millions of Christians throughout the world.

And these are just two examples. There are many of them. Many the best of these examples are in God's Word.

But although He is working His plan through, this imperfect world is not ideal to God. All of history is His working toward renewal. In the last part of this series, we will look at that.

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## [Here Where Dogs Bite and Bees Sting: Part One](#)

And predators eat prey. Tornadoes destroy. Disease wastes and kills. The sun blisters. Hangnails, well, hang. And so on and so forth. Everything that lives is in the process of dying. The imperfection of nature is expressed in a hundred billion ways throughout the universe every day.

A large chunk of humankind has assumed this as all God's fault, an injustice that our supposedly good, all-powerful God is not remedying which therefore makes Him evil and/or a powerless God. There are so many things wrong with that line of thinking.

I think to fully understand it—even remotely—you must look and think closely about some biblical teachings and concepts. This three-part series will look at 1) how the problem began, 2) life with the problem, 3) and how the problem will end. It will not be a thorough look at the issue. Not even close. The subject is way too complex for that and has been the subject of whole books. Rather this is mainly a general overview.

It all started when the free will of man and pride met to create the biggest human moral problem in the universe.



Although this article is not specifically looking at the problem it created in the human heart, the human moral problem is where the whole issue started so we will look at that first.

### **The Corruption of Free Will**

So about this thing called free will. Like everything else, God created it to be a good thing. But also like everything else it can be made into a bad thing. C.S. Lewis says “If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad...Why, then, did God give them [us] free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible...makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having” (Mere Christianity, 48).

The big baddie himself, Satan, was good once but may have been the first to warp God’s gift of free will. God created and made him the top angel in His kingdom, but this wasn’t good enough and he chose rebellion. And then he later convinced Adam and Eve on behalf of humankind to choose to rebel too. And evil has since infected all of mankind.

Evil comes in many guises. It does not always look evil or self-centered. In fact, it can be born of a desire to do something good. Tolkien commented on this very thing. Tolkien was not only one of the greatest Fantasy writers who ever lived, but he was also a very great Christian thinker who was instrumental in converting Lewis, his best friend, to Christ.

Tolkien believed that evil is good in its originally created form. In a letter to a prospective publisher, Tolkien related how he viewed evil: “...frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others—speedily and according to the benefactor’s own plans” (The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, 146). Yes, evil can either look good or as previously mentioned originate in a good source. Throughout his masterpiece, The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien demonstrates his view that at one time the forces of evil were originally intended by their creator to be good.

Morgoth, Saruman, Sauron, Gollum—such evil forces were created good but chose to be corrupted. And trolls, orcs, and the Nazgul were originally created good ents, elves, and men, but were corrupted by evil.

Evil is also a force both outside of man and within man. At various times in history, there have been well-meaning individuals who postulated that there is either internal evil which is evil that arises in each of us or there is an evil force outside of us that makes us choose evil. Tolkien said there is both. He demonstrated this dual nature of evil in The Lord of The Rings. Through the ring, Frodo, the ring bearer, is tempted both internally and externally by the dark lord Sauron.

Frodo came to recognize, respect, and at times resist this seductive force as demonstrated in the valley of Minas Morgul in the presence of the witch-king:

*“...he felt, more urgent than ever before, the command that he should put on the Ring. But great as the pressure was, he felt no inclination now to yield to it...There was no longer any answer to that command in his own will, dismayed by terror though it was, and he felt only the beating upon him of a great power from outside. It took his hand, and as Frodo watched with his mind, not willing it but in suspense (as if he looked on some story far away), it moved the hand inch by inch towards the chain upon his neck. Then his own will stirred; slowly it forced the hand back...”*  
(Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, 315-316)

In all its forms, evil is evil. if it is opposite of God's expressed will, that's exactly what it is. It does not matter if any man judges something to be good. Anything that is contradictory to God is evil.

The fact that God gave us entirely free wills to either choose or to reject this evil almost makes it amazing that He was able to have a plan at all. almost. Not really, though. God is divine and all-knowing of the past, present, and future so it's actually not that surprising. In His infinite knowledge, He was able to plan the entire redemptive history of man before creation even got started. The Apostle Paul spoke of a mystery, a hidden wisdom, that God ordained before the world began (1 Corinthians 2:7). The salvation act of Jesus Christ, God the Son who was God the Father, was the planned end result of all of this, but the free wills of man were left free. God knew what would we choose and planned accordingly.

Via God's long plan of salvation, we have been enabled to exert our free will again to begin the process of being returned to our perfect state one day. Frodo was eventually able to exert his free will to the good and thusly destroy the overpowering ring. That kind of exertion of our free will is necessary to begin the process of turning back the damage caused by the original corruption in the Garden of Eden. We'll come back to that in the last part of this series.

For now, all of mankind is burdened with evil. Adam and Eve made their horrible choice and because of it man was cursed. But their bad choice affected more than just humanity. Their error also cursed the rest of creation with imperfection. Adam and Eve eventually died in a world that was increasingly hard to care for, in a land that they had had a hand in corrupting. In the second part of this series we will look at that corruption.

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# Five Reasons Fall Is Better Than Summer

Fall in recent times has taken its lumps for the “pumpkin spice” craze that people seem to find annoying because here in America we love being annoyed. Historically, it has brought on the beginning of the school year, which causes groans from some people I’m sure. Although as a teacher I confess that I embrace the familiarity of a returning structured schedule and the newness of student lists that greet me every September.

Today we celebrate the finer aspects of this exquisite season. Here are five reasons to love fall more than summer.

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## **Because Sports**

Is there really a better stretch of the sports calendar than Fall? I’d venture to say that October is the greatest month for sports.

First, you have the baseball playoffs which are second to none. Yes, we know that MLB players are known as “the boys of summer”, but it’s during the Fall when we are treated to the payoff for the long grind of the regular season: post season baseball! Legends are born in the post season. From Schilling’s bloody sock to Morris’ 10 inning shutout in game 7 of the World Series the post season produces memories that will last a lifetime. Home runs become mythical feats that transcend the sport. Remember Kirk Gibson’s walk off homer on two bad knees in his only plate appearance of the 1988 World Series? Or Joe Carter’s World Series winning home run in 1993? Everything about post season games is magnified. Albert Pujols

pretty much single-handedly altered Brad Lidge's career in the post season. And who could forget the Red Sox coming back from 3 games down in a best of 7 series against the Yankees! Whether it's the excitement of the winner takes all Wild Card games or the thrills of a 7 game series something special happens when you take a sport known for its "there's always another game" attitude and have the outcome determined by only a handful of games. If you have your doubts then you don't have to look back beyond last post season which produced one of the most exciting, dramatic World Series of all time.

Also, October has historically been the only month where you can get games that matter in the NFL, NBA and MLB (though November is now joining it...which is still in fall!) Imagine a world where on Sunday, October 15 we get a full slate of NFL games, on October 16 we get Game 3 of an ALCS with Boston battling Cleveland and on the 17th we get the NBA tipping off with the Cavs battling the Celtics, fresh off that mega-trade this Summer. What a world!! Only in Fall.

Plus, it gives us some outrageously big college football games, high school football, the beginning of college basketball and the beginning of hockey. It's a veritable feast for sports fans during the fall months.

– Gowdy Cannon and Mark Sass

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**You can stop being hot and humid and sticky and sweaty 24 hours a day.**

I know that many will recoil in horror at this notion, but I really don't care for summer that much. Much of this is due to the oppressive weather. You go outside for just a little bit and that extra strength antiperspirant you just put on is gone in ten minutes and a river of sweat is coursing from every sweat gland of your body. In no time at all you can smell your own stench which is always a bad sign. And then this stench

attracts every gnat and mosquito from miles around with no pest repellent known to mankind able to withstand the insectile attack. And night isn't that much better. I am one of those unfortunate souls who can't sleep very well unless there are lots of covers caking me. So it's annoying when the nights are so oppressive that you are forced to use only a sheet or two at most. But then autumn falls and its quite literally a breath of fresh air. Gone is the air so thick with humidity that it's like the mask of death itself. Gone are the days when your sweaty clothes cling to your body's every orifice for dear life. Gone, making way for the cool, cool winds of fall.

– Ben Plunkett

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## **Bonfires!**

I love a good bonfire. I love sitting outside, when the weather is cool, enjoying the heat and light of a crackling fire. I love roasting marshmallows and hot dogs. I love eating said marshmallows and hot dogs. (I like both of them a little charred. Come at me.)

I've enjoyed bonfires with our church's youth group, with friends, and with family. It's always a special time. Hanging out with people you care about, seeing their faces light up in the glow of the fire, spending hours and hours talking, joking, and laughing – there are very few activities I know of that inspire the kind of camaraderie and fellowship like a bonfire. And outside of the Fall months, the chances are slim you are building a bonfire.

– Phill Lytle

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## **Movie Marathons**

Namely, every year my wife and I enjoy a Halloween marathon

and a Christmas marathon. For Halloween we do NOT watch things that are gory or filled with obscene language or content. But that still leaves tons of great options for being innocently scared, especially if you include TV. For example, [last year my wife and I watched several episodes of Doctor Who](#), that are entirely Halloween-esque yet not an assault on morality and decency. This year we will watch the Yang Trilogy from the TV show *Psych*, an incredible run of three consecutive season finales from a TV show we adore.

But this year is extremely special for another reason. This year *Stranger Things 2* comes out. And even though I have learned that the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry, our tentative plan is to watch several movies that helped inspire this Netflix original series (*Ghostbusters*, *Stand By Me*, *Poltergeist*, etc.), then rewatch Season 1 from October 23-26 and end the marathon watching the new season from October 27-31. I have purposefully watched less TV September this year in anticipation of this event. If the Cubs make the World Series again, we are going to have some serious decisions to make.

My wife doesn't enjoy the Halloween marathons as much as I do, but I appreciate her being a good sport. And she did enjoy Season 1 of *Stranger Things*. But she is more into Christmas movies and starting around December 1 we will enter another glorious time of bonding over some of our favorite Christmas stories told on the big and small screens.

– Gowdy Cannon

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## **Fall means Halloween and Halloween means CANDY!**

First, let's address the elephant in the room: Halloween is evil and of the Devil. As Christians, we do not participate in any Halloween activities. Ever. (Sidebar: Ladies, I would like to use this opportunity to urge all of you to not use

Halloween as an excuse to dress like a prostitute. You are better than that. Be better than that.) But change that name to *Fall Festival*, or *Trunk and Treat*, and we are totally cool with that! All of that presupposes that candy is involved at these alternate celebrations/activities. If there is candy, all is well with the world. [We love candy.](#)

Little known fact: This time of year is one of the best reasons to have children. You get way more candy that way because your kids come home from their “Fall” activities with mountains of candy. And you, as their loving parent, get to partake in all that bounty. Be fruitful and multiply people! There is a mother lode of candy in your future if you do!

– Phill Lytle

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## 500 + 63 Words or Less Reviews: The Deathly Hallows

It took me almost a year, but I have finally finished my first reading of the 7-book Harry Potter series and it has been quite the ride, one of the best literary adventures of my life. Over the course of my journey I have met wizards, witches, goblins, ghouls, werewolves, house elves, talking portraits, merpeople, centaurs, giants, dragons, and dementors. And this is only a portion of the beings Harry Potter has introduced me to.

While I still consider *The Half Blood Prince* the best book in the series for a variety of reasons, the *Deathly Hallows* is not far behind. It came across to me as the most realistic of the entire lot with its depiction of what a storybook



“adventure” would probably be like. There would likely be a lot of wandering about and being unsure as to what to do. People would get irritated with each other, they would get bored with all the wandering around looking for something, and everyone involved would get disillusioned with the whole shebang in varying degrees and forms. Much like the adventure of life itself.

It was also a much different animal in that most of it did not take place in Hogwarts but on the aforementioned climactic adventure. In my opinion, the personal drama that goes on between the three adventurers while the adventure slowly got going is not remotely detracting. In fact, this personal drama made up some of the best parts of the book. There was a heaping helping of meaty characterization to be had there by all three of them.

And there is the other big character of the book who wasn't even around for the vast majority of it. Although he died in *The Half Blood Prince*, Dumbledore's presence is huge in the *Deathly Hallows*. In much of the book it is as though he were symbolic of the God of Scripture with Harry constantly questioning him and why he didn't explain this or that while he was alive. Whether or not Rowling really meant for this to be the case when she wrote it, I don't know, but the likeness is strong.

We also learn a lot about Dumbledore's personal backstory and that he wasn't perfect after all. Like everyone else, he had baggage, baggage that for him directed the course of the rest of his life. It is brilliant characterization of a character that had already left the world of our story.

*The Deathly Hallows* is a fitting culmination of all the preceding acts. And we take many a sad farewell (for the present) of Hermione, Ron, the other Weasleys, Lupin, Tonks, Mad Dog Moody, Luna, Neville, Hagrid, McGonagall, and many other unforgettable characters that have left on us a lasting

impact. Oddly, though, the departure the most emotional to me, was the farewell of the Dursleys. Those Muggliest of all Muggles who treated Harry like so much trash for so long somehow managed to worm their way into my heart. I'll miss them.

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That is the end of my 500WoL. Here is my personal ranking of the seven books:

1. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
  2. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*
  3. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
  4. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
  5. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
  6. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
  7. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*
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## [Five More Movie Dinner Scenes We Love](#)

We enjoyed putting together our [last list](#) so much we decided to do it again. We also loved all the interaction we received in response to our previous list, even from those that yelled at us and called us names. We are confident this second list will inspire the same sort of reaction. (Finger's crossed!) Feel free to post your feedback, insults, and name-calling in the comment section below. Bon appetite!

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## The Thin Man by Benjamin Plunkett



The Thin Man was released in 1934, two years after the publication of the book on which it is based. Most of the acting in the movie is okay at best. It is saved by two things: The masterful, charismatic acting of William Powell and Myrna Loy; and excellent writing throughout. Along with the help of his trusty dog, Asta, Nick Charles (Powell) investigates the mysterious disappearance of an old inventor friend who he discovers is murdered. It culminates in a dinner with all the assembled suspects in which Charles reveals the culprit. Like most great dinner scenes, the dinner is chock full of some angst-driven dialogue between the hilariously tense guests, Nora (Loy), and engineered by the very laid back Nick who is obviously relishing the evening. While revealing the facts of the case he sometimes randomly shouts the name of this or that guest. This guest jumps out of their pants (no, not literally). At other times he makes sudden comments directly to guests such as asking one not to hold his butter knife in a threatening way or asking another if he saw anything important as he gazed into his crystal. And in the end the evil-deed doer is revealed to be no other than—ho, ho, ho, you sly devil. You'll have to watch the movie for that juicy bit of info. At the time, the movie was so popular that it spawned five sequels.

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## Christmas Vacation by Gowdy Cannon



*Christmas Vacation* was released when I was in the 8th grade and at my small town high school the following exchange got randomly quoted year round, and not just at Christmas:

*"GRACE!"*

*"Grace? She passed away 30 years ago!!"*

*"They want you to say grace. THE BLESSING."*

And then someone would invariably start into the Pledge of Allegiance. Considering the fact that she wrapped up her cat earlier in the movie, Aunt Bethany definitely could steal a scene, as she does at this epic family dinner.

But of course we should not fail to mention a classic Clark vs. Cousin Eddie moment. After Clark announces Santa Clause has been spotted by the news, Eddie chimes in, "You serious, Clark?" Village idiots are dime a dozen in entertainment, but very few people have played the doofus this well. The list of people that I am positive could have delivered that line so believably starts with Chris Pratt and Randy Quaid. And it's probably not much longer than that.

Just a hilarious four minutes. Back in my teen years and on through college and young adulthood, watching this movie was a Christmas tradition. It helped kick off the festivities. So I am thrilled to include it in this sequel to our great dinner scenes article.

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## The Incredibles by Phill Lytle



In 2004, *Pixar Studios* gave us *The Incredibles*. Written and directed by Brad Bird, the film was an original superhero story about the Parr family – a family of super-powered individuals who have been forced, due to governmental and societal pressures, to keep their powers hidden from the world. They live normal lives. They are the classic nuclear family. Yet underneath that veneer of familiarity and averageness, everyone in the family, besides baby Jack-Jack, are gifted with powers ranging from super strength to elasticity.

Early in the film, there is a scene set at the dinner table. It is the quintessential examination of both sides of their lives. It is the picture of a family that is not connecting – something that many viewers can identify with. You see the stay-at-home wife and mother, Helen, after a long day of juggling household duties, running the kids to and from

school, and caring for an infant, sitting down at the dinner table trying to engage her husband with the events of the day. You see the husband and father, Bob, home from a long day at a job he hates, distracted and irritable. You have the young boy, Dash, with too much energy to spare and no outlet for any of it. Finally, you have the teenage girl, Violet, sullen, withdrawn, and doing everything she can to stay hidden from the world. (The baby is there as well but he is perfectly oblivious to all the tension in the room.)

Throughout the dinner, each character demonstrates all aspects of who they are – the normal and the super. Helen is pulled in all directions (both literally and figuratively) as she tries to manage the household and make things work in less-than-ideal circumstances. Bob is dissatisfied and frustrated because he knows full well that his life is meant for more than sitting in a cubicle all day. His talents are being wasted and his impressive power flashes at inopportune moments throughout the meal. The kids all add their own unique issues and gifts to the conversation. The scene is funny and intelligent, insightful and recognizable. We can connect with it, even though we do not have powers, because we identify with exactly what this family is facing. Brad Bird uses one of the most familiar settings – the dinner table – to peel back layer after layer of family dynamics, cultural expectations, and the dangers of settling and compromise. This scene firmly establishes each character, their roles, the major themes of the film, and foreshadows the climactic resolution of the film by presenting its inverse in a delightfully funny sequence.

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## **The Return of the King by Benjamin Plunkett**



Although there are those who claim to be able to do so, you will be very hard pressed to settle on any one element in the theatrical trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* as the one element that is better than anything else in it. The movies, all three of them, are caked with brilliance and layered with excellence. One of the many, many ingenious elements is Denethor's lunch/dinner scene in *Return of the King*. In this scene Denethor appears to be eating a meal composed of many vegetables, with baby tomatoes making an Oscar-worthy appearance. His madness and the decadence in which his life has become steeped is characterized by his viciously chomping the cherry tomatoes like some brute beast as their red ooze dribbles carelessly down his face like blood. He eats his little feast while commanding Pippen to sing a song to him. The singing, the eating, all seamlessly juxtaposed with a scene of his son, Farimir, and his men, riding to certain death by Denethor's mad command. To this day, I can't eat baby tomatoes without thinking of that scene. In those instances, I do the only rational thing and pretend to be old Denethor.

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**Lars and the Real Girl by Phill Lytle**



I've written about this movie for REO before – you can read that [here](#). In hopes of not spending too much time getting bogged down in the details, I'll keep this concise: Lars, the protagonist, is different. He lives in a converted garage behind his brother (Gus) and sister-in-law's (Karin) house. He is withdrawn and awkward. His family worries about him. He orders a sex doll online and pretends she is a real person. (Read my review if you need more details.) The first time we, and his family, meet his new "girlfriend" Bianca, is at dinner. When Lars tells them he is bringing a girl to eat with them, they are so excited. Then, they are sitting across the table staring at a life-like, sex doll. They are dumbfounded. Lars is as happy as can be. Bianca takes it all in stride. The scene is a masterpiece of awkward humor, strained conversation, and quirky character interaction. It sets the table for the rest of the film perfectly.

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# Approaching Autumn

REO proudly presents Ben Plunkett's newest poem – *Approaching Autumn*. We decided to present this one in a different format than usual, hoping that it would capture more people's attention. It deserves that. One suggestion, please watch it in Full Screen mode for best viewing. Otherwise, the text might be hard to read for those with less-than-perfect vision.

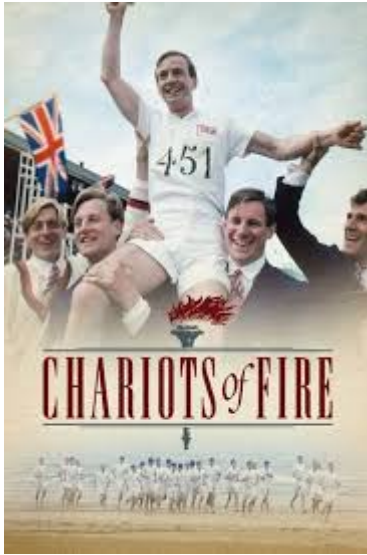
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## Five Sports Movies Our Staff Love

The best movies tell unforgettable stories and introduce us to legendary characters and performances. So it is no surprise that in a culture obsessed with sports, some of the best films of all time are about them. Sports prove that truth is indeed better than fiction quite often—you will notice below and on any list of sports movies how many are based on or inspired by true stories. Movies, for their part, make us interested in sports we as Americans often are not obsessed with, like boxing, karate and hockey. The two together have given us exceptional entertainment.

Today our staff discusses five sports films that we love. This is not a Top Five list; just five selections that impacted us deeply...as sports fans (most of us), moviegoers and human beings that love to be inspired.

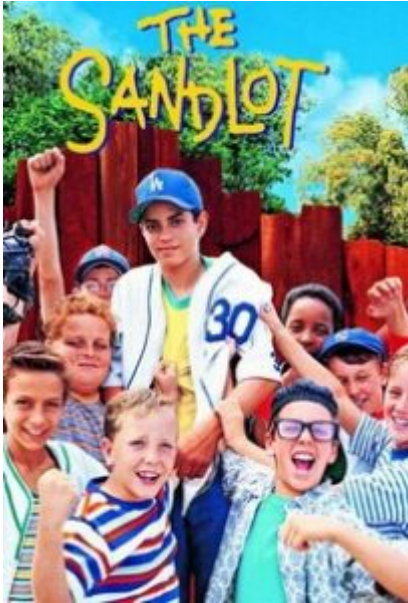
## Chariots of Fire by Ben Plunkett



I can't remember exactly when or where I first saw *The Chariots of Fire*. All I know for sure is that it was in the first half of the 80s. My best friend at the time later said he stopped watching immediately when the first shot was of a bunch of guys running down the beach in their underwear. But I went against the norm of kids in my age bracket and watched the whole thing. It remains one of the most inspirational movies I have ever seen. (Not the best, in my opinion, although it is excellent). I remember in the months afterward I would pretend to be Eric Liddel, running in one of the first races we see him in. He's doing really well, but then another racer pushes him down to the side of the track. He falls with a crash and his race seems over. But then he gets up, runs like a chariot of fire, passes all the runners who are all way ahead of him, and runs like a beast to against all odds win the race. I'd put on our *Chariots of Fire* record and run in slow motion around the living room, dramatically falling and rising in strategic places. That particular Liddel story isn't the only great and inspirational moment in the film, though, not by a long shot. All the details surrounding the 1924 Olympics are legendary. The movie inspired me to be a runner. Yeah, that didn't really pan out.

Most inspirational of all to me as a Christian was Liddel's Christian strength exemplified perfectly throughout the whole movie, especially at the Olympics. It is also inspirational to know that after the events of the movie he left his successful running career to be a missionary in China.

## The Sandlot by Allen Pointer



My favorite film, not just favorite sports film, is *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell is one of my heroes.

My sleeper sports film? *Victory*. I saw it when it was released during my high school years and it was epic.

Someone beat me to both of these films.

So that leaves me to write about another film that I have grown to love that I had never seen until last year.

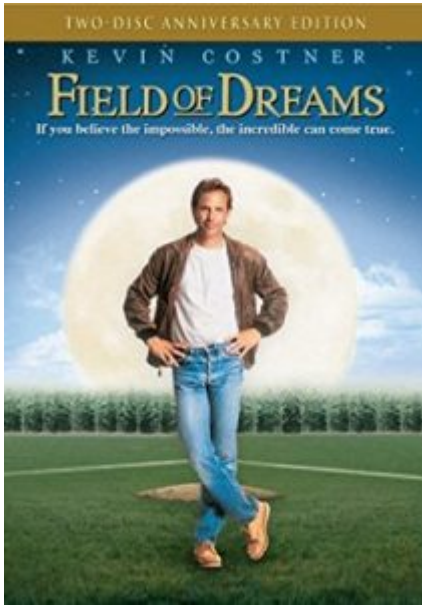
*The Sandlot*.

Nostalgic. Great retro Los Angeles Angels cap, and a KC Monarchs Negro League cap as well. Playing ball all day long. All of the names for Babe Ruth. James Earl Jones. What is not to love?

But my favorite part by far is when Benny brings Smalls into the group. A shy, awkward young man is saved by the kindness of the star of the team. While everyone else is making fun, Benny allows a young man entrance into the most important team in the world, located at the local sandlot. Consumed by a love of baseball, he looks beyond that to do the decent thing, and through an extra ball glove and cap includes someone starving for belonging in the group that matters the most.

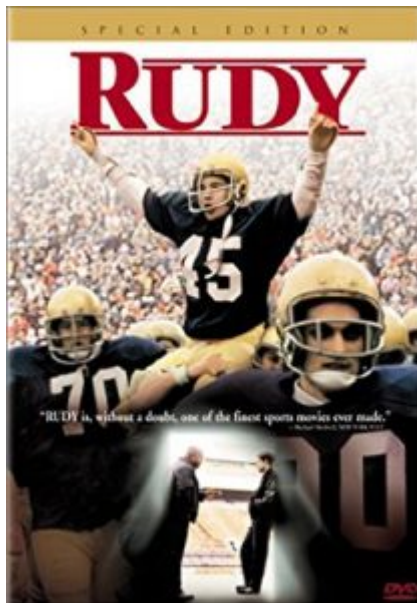
I am glad that I finally watched *The Sandlot*.

## Field of Dreams by Phill Lytle



What do you get when you combine two of my favorite things – sports and fantasy? You get one of my favorite films – *Field of Dreams*. I love everything about this film. I love the premise – the out-of-his-depth farmer hearing voices in his corn field telling him to build a baseball field in their place. I love the performances – Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones, Ray Liotta, Amy Madigan, and Burt Lancaster all create believable and interesting characters. The music is appropriately winsome when needed and epic when called for. While some baseball purists huff and puff about the accuracy of the players and if they are batting and throwing with the correct hand, those things are minor details in the grand picture. The film is about heart, inspiration, and grand gestures. It's never meant to be a realistic portrayal of baseball or family dynamics. It's a fantasy story built around a baseball diamond in a corn field. Where ghosts of great players come to play. And sons are reunited and reconciled with their long deceased fathers. It's beautiful and life-affirming stuff and I enjoy it more every time I watch it.

## Rudy by Gowdy Cannon



I played basketball in high school, but being 5'10 and 135 lbs, I realized by my 10th-grade year I had to abandon the dream of playing in the ACC. So you can see how a real life story-turned-movie like that of Daniel "Rudy" Ruettiger would captivate me.

Let there be no doubt that some of the supporting roles are memorable: a baby-faced Vince Vaughn, an endearing and relateable Jon Favreau and a heart-wrenching performance by Charles S. Dutton as Fortune. When he slow claps at the end before walking off, I want to stand up and clap for him. Every time.

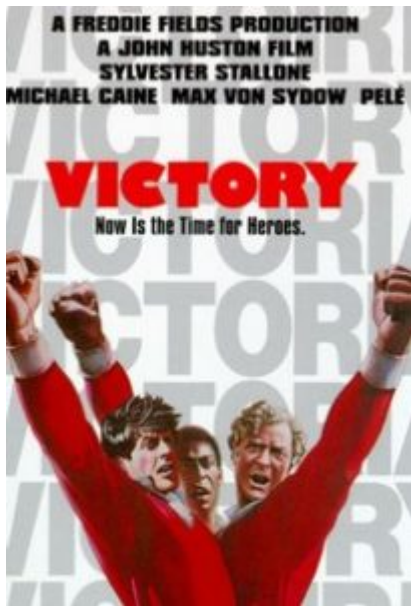
But not many movies this good relied quite so heavily on the lead as *Rudy*. Sean Astin has had roles as glorious as Samwise Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings* movies and as ridiculous as Bill the Speedo-wearing swim instructor in Adam Sandler's *Click*. In *Rudy*, he gives a masterpiece that will be what I associate with his name the rest of his life.

There are the obvious emotional moments near the end of the movie that make it great—when the Notre Dame players one by one give up their jerseys in the coach's office (which didn't really happen but was an excellent touch of dramatic license), and when they start the famous "RU-DY!" chant near the end of the final game. But there are two moments that I cherish deep in my heart that are less famous but equally as meaningful: when he gets rejected by Notre Dame to be a student for the third time and he balls the letter up and bangs his head against the wall, and when he finally makes it onto Notre Dame's practice squad and is getting his brains beat out and

keeps getting up and challenging the offensive linemen: “I’m a defensive lineman from Purdue!” Those are what make Rudy special: perseverance despite failure, pain and every reason in the world to quit.

*Rudy* does not culminate in a magical moment of winning like in *Miracle* or an epic individual center stage performance as in *Rocky*. All Rudy did was make a meaningless sack after finally getting on the field. Yet it was way bigger than that. It was about real world inspiration from a man whose heart was too big to ever give up. That is why they carried him off the field in real life. And that is why this movie is on our list today.

## Victory by Nathan Patton



Most of the people to whom I’ve mentioned the movie *Victory* (or *Escape to Victory* as it’s known across the pond) have never heard of it. Those who have didn’t like it. It’s a favorite in my house though.

It’s a war movie that I can actually show my kids. Of course it’s not completely realistic, but I’m also not having to send them to a therapist after it’s over.

The great Sir Michael Caine and Sylvester “Sly” Stallone aren’t really believable as world class soccer players, but they’re loveable and fun to watch, and the movie is full of some of the greatest soccer players of all time, including

Pele and Bobby Moore.

The basic plot is that a German officer arranges for allied prisoners to play a friendly soccer match with some of the guards at a POW camp in France, just for fun. It gets caught up in the Nazi propaganda machine and becomes a match between the best of the Allied POW players from all over Nazi occupied territory (mostly famous soccer players before the war) and the German national team in Paris, intending to show that the Nazis are superior. Intermingled throughout are escape plots and attempts. It is loosely based on an actual match played between a Ukrainian team and the German team during World War II.

Yes, it does share some similarities to *The Longest Yard*, except, of course, that it's about a sport that actually matters...

What is your favorite? Share with us below!

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## [Five Random \(and Mostly Mad\) Musings on the Solar Eclipse of 2017](#)

The Great Solar Eclipse of 2017 instigated many a thought, and thoughts in thoughts, and side pockets of thoughts in thoughts, and ever on and on. Not just in me, but in everyone in the galaxy, almost all earthlings, four out of five extra-terrestrials, and those two old guys sitting on the sun yelling at someone to shut the door because they're too cold.

Everyone has thoughts. I think. Anyway, I, yes even I, had thoughts of my own as the eclipse flashed before my eyes. Here are a few random bits of those thoughts. Most of these are as mad as a Hatter, with the last being pretty serious. Enjoy.

1. I am super glad the world didn't end during the eclipse, because I haven't even seen an effective over-the-counter invisible potion yet. This is my ultimate dream. Yeah, I know a few months ago I wrote an article categorizing five stupendous reasons why becoming invisible is probably a bad idea. Yeah, well, I guess it's the danger element. You know how people are drawn to doing things that are not a good idea? Like snorkeling. Everyone wants to snorkel, but you know you can drown. For reals. I know and let me tell you you can have it. I'm done with the whole shebang. What happens is you end up all panicky and suffocating and almost drowning in two feet of water and floundering about while two kids gawk at the strange man pretending to be an epileptic walrus. Anways, about how the passing of the eclipse and the world not ending is a pretty good thing right now. Totes awes. It paves the way for a clean slate where the medical and magical community have time to combine their considerable efforts to concoct a safe and legal pharmaceutical drug. Until that day I will just have to do what I usually do and act all invisible. If my dream happens by the next eclipse, we'll be good to go.

2. I wonder what happens to werewolves during a total solar eclipse. Usually it's the case that people with the werewolfian affliction turn from their human form into their werewolf form when the full moon shines upon the earth. During a total solar eclipse it's pretty much the exact opposite. So what happens to werepeople when that happens? Do they turn into the opposite of werewolves? What is that, werekitty? Whatever the case the were-community is staying mum on the issue. There was no comment from their neck of the woods...OF HORROR!!! It does not look like an answer to this question is



soon forthcoming since it gets real, real dark during solar eclipses so that we are literally in the dark on the issue.

3. Watching the moon ease its way over the sun on Monday I thought many a profound thought, meditated on many a deep question. Chief among them: Did an eclipse inspire the creation of Pac-Man? Looked at another way, the crescent formed could very well have been Lewis Carroll's muse for the Cheshire Cat's mad grin. How about Bonnie Tyler's "Total Eclipse of the Heart"? (Obviously.) And those are just a few examples. There are songs, movies, toys, books, etc. Any way you look at it, the solar eclipses of yore have had a dramatic impact on popular culture. The solar eclipse of 2017 has transcended above a one-time natural occurrence and has given lasting inspiration to millions, maybe billions. It is truly a total eclipse of our hearts.

4. Another reason I'm relieved the eclipse didn't end the earth was I thought of an awesome joke that would otherwise have heartbreakingly never been told. I present to you my newest standup material:

Darth Vader: What have I told you, bounty hunter?

Boba Fett: No disintegrations.

Darth Vader: No. I'm Fett up with you. Boom! (Heavy breathing)

And there you have it. I thought it up by myself in my brain. You can thank me later. I'm thinking of continuing the routine by having Admiral Piett try to top Vader with a crazy Boba-themed pun of his own like "that was Bounty to happen" or "000h, shishka-Boba." That's still in development stage, though. Good thing there's not another eclipse on the horizon. Oh, yeah. See what I did there?

5. Serious time here: I was not really expecting much from the eclipse, but it ended up being many times better. In fact, it was undoubtedly one of the most amazing things I have ever

seen. The ring of fire and then total darkness of the eclipse itself was an awesome act of God itself, but thankfully I took the time to take off my glasses and observe my surroundings during totality. As we all know it became as dark as night, but there was also an apparent sunset in all the horizons that we could see from my sister's house. I have read that this is something that usually happens during a total eclipse and that this apparent sunset is a phenomenon that happens in every direction. And there was also the shifting and mysterious shadows that moved across the earth, the trees, the houses as the moon moved off of the sun and the light and the humid heat of day gradually returned. Fellow contributor, Phill Lytle, has commented that God stopped the human madness of the passed few weeks to show us the power of His handiwork. (Not his exact words.) Indeed He has.

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## **The NFL on REO: Football is Back! Sort of.**

**Fake Football – Phill Lytle**

Football is back!



Preseason football is here!



After the long, long offseason, we finally have actual football to watch. Except, it's not really football. Not in the true sense of the word. During the preseason, teams don't game-plan, they don't strategize, and they don't really care about winning or losing. The starters will usually only play a series or two, and the rest of the game is filled with a bunch of players that will rarely play when the games finally count for something.

Doesn't matter though, if you are a die-hard NFL fan. We still watch. I watched every second of the first Titans' preseason snorefest. It was ugly. Neither team looked good. The Titans looked disinterested and bored. The Jets looked incompetent. The final score resembled an MLB game, but was less action packed and slower paced than any baseball game I have seen in some time. I'm sure the ratings were spectacular – no sarcasm intended. People love NFL football.

Here's to three more meaningless preseason games with no injuries!

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In our continued effort to get more voices and perspectives for our NFL coverage, we have asked Ben Plunkett to occasionally contribute his thoughts to various NFL matters. Disclaimer: Ben does not watch football, knows nothing about the current players, and literally does no

research. But he stands by every word he writes! We proudly present:

### **Behind the Headlines by Benjamin Plunkett**

I have always admired personalities who have risen above adversity to greatness. For Marshawn Lynch that adversity came in the form of being an unexpected and unwanted child. Few people know that Marshawn is the second of identical twins. His firstborn brother, Shawn, was really all his parents expected. Then to the complete surprise of everyone present—including the medical staff—came his brother. They named him More Shawn because they were, like, “Hey, more Shawn!. Over time this became Marshawn. But for the purposes of this article to avoid any confusion we will simply call him More Shawn.

At birth, More Shawn bore gifts: A nerf football in one hand and a video of Raiders of the Lost Ark in the other. By seven years of age he had mastered the fedora and bullwhip. By ten he vowed an unbreakable vow to wipe every last Nazi from the face of the earth. By 15 he had grown a lifelong hatred of snakes. All this considered, it is an understatement to say that after high school, More Shawn was ready to join the Oakland Raiders. Plus, he still had his nerf football, which he could throw, like, really, really far.

I’m a big Harrison Ford fan so it makes perfect sense that More Shawn should always be a poster child of greatness to me and my kind. Sadly, More Shawn’s career was cut short at the age of 21, just after he had joined the Raiders. During that year some random lady he had just met shot him. This drove him out of the game for about 15 or so years. Now, girded with his prize nerf football which he has named “Wonderball,” More Shawn is at 36 just now triumphantly returning to his beloved game.

In my opinion, More Shawn isn't that old. I think the rabid football fans of Ephesus of Paul the Apostle's day would agree. In that culture, anyone under the age of 40 was considered young. No, I don't think it will matter as long as he can throw "Wonderball" up to the top of the stadium and hit the lights. As long as he is able to do that and make sparks dance all over the field while he runs in slow motion, everything should be hunky dory. And despite his "advanced age", he has proven himself more than capable of doing so. The team mascot has been cited as declaring, "That boy can throw like really, really far."

No, there is not one iota of doubt in my mind that More Shawn could throw a football over them mountains. I think if Coach would have put him in for the fourth quarter, they would've been state champions. No doubt. No doubt in my mind.

Anyhoo, let me know what you think about all this. Can More Shawn still throw, like, really, really far? Does he still have skills with a bullwhip? What about a bow staff? All that can be known for certain is that the future of mankind rests on his shoulders. I also know that More Shawn will prove to be the best thing since Baby Gays changed its name to Q-tips.

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### **A Possible Solution To an 18 Game Regular Season – Phill Lytle**

The buzz term for the NFL the past few years has been Player Safety. Rules have been changed. Fines levied. Research done. All in the name of Player Safety. Yet, the league office continues to float out the idea of an 18 game regular season. I won't regurgitate what I've already written about this awful idea – you can find that [here](#). And I won't belabor the point too much, because plenty has been said about this issue. But the truth of that matter is that the owners want more revenue and they believe adding games to the schedule will make that possible, so this idea is not going anywhere.

At the same time, I do believe the owners would be willing to forgo adding games to the regular season if they could add more teams, and therefore more games, to the playoffs. And for the sake of the integrity of the game, that is actually an idea I am willing to entertain. Perhaps it would dilute the quality of the playoffs a bit. As of now, only 12 teams make it to the postseason. If you added two more teams per conference, that would mean that half the league would make it to the playoffs. Maybe that is too much. I don't know. What I do know is that plan is far preferable to adding more games to the regular season – risking more injury and more attrition. If I were in charge of the players union, I would only agree to more playoff teams and games in exchange for less preseason games and whatever other items they deem important. I actually think this scenario is not only possible, but would considerably reduce the chances of any work stoppage at the next collective bargaining meetings.

Just my two thoughts. What do you guys think?