

WORDS FROM BIGTOP

JULY 8TH, 2026

Swinging for the Fences

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What Dr. Chasteen Was Really Teaching Me

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function... Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”

Romans 12:4-6

The Lesson at the Plate

Dr. John Chasteen Sr. never lectured me about patience directly. He just talked baseball.

He'd tell me about his approach at the plate — take a few pitches, work the count, put the ball in play, get on base. Not flashy. Not a highlight reel. But *consistent*. Meanwhile I was the guy swinging from my heels every time, chasing the pitch that would leave the yard. When I connected, it was a moonshot. When I didn't, I was walking back to the dugout shaking my head.

He'd remind me: Babe Ruth is remembered as the Home Run King. What people forget is that for most of his career, he also led the league in strikeouts. The same aggressive swing that produced 714 home runs also produced over 1,300 strikeouts — more than almost anyone who ever played the game. The very thing that made him legendary was inseparable from the thing that made him fail, loudly, all the time.

So — who's the better player? The patient, consistent average hitter, or the one swinging for the fences?

Here's the honest answer: it depends on what the team needs, and it depends on the *season of life* the player is in.

The Case for the Consistent Hitter

The .300 average hitter who rarely strikes out is the backbone of a lineup. He's dependable. He doesn't put the team in a hole. He moves runners over, extends innings, and rarely lets the moment get bigger than his mechanics. In real life, this is the person who shows up every day, does the unglamorous work, keeps their word, and builds trust through repetition rather than spectacle.

Pros: Reliability. Low volatility. People can build a plan around you. You rarely blow things up.

Cons: You can plateau. Consistency without growth becomes a ceiling. If you never take the big swing, you never find out what you were actually capable of.

The Case for the Home Run Hitter

The power hitter changes the game in one swing. He creates energy, he creates urgency in the other dugout, and when he connects, the scoreboard moves in a way singles never will. In real life, this is the visionary, the risk-taker, the person who sees the door nobody else sees and just walks through it.

Pros: Outsized upside. Momentum-shifting impact. The capacity to do something nobody else on the team could do.

Cons: Volatility. Strikeouts. Long stretches where it looks like nothing is working — until suddenly something does. Left unchecked, this temperament burns out the people around it, or burns out itself.

What Dr. Chasteen was actually telling me wasn't "stop swinging for the fences." He knew he needed guys like me on the team. What he was teaching me was *situational awareness* — that a leader, a businessman, a man of faith has to know when the moment calls for a sacrifice bunt and when it calls for a three-run homer. Maturity isn't picking one swing for the rest of your life. It's developing the judgment to know which swing the at-bat requires.

Mr. Dependable: Living Out the Consistent Swing

I didn't fully understand what Dr. Chasteen was teaching me until I lived it myself, years later, in a season I never would have chosen.

I was going through my divorce, and I plugged in deeper to my church than I ever had before. I played aux keys and piano every week — both Sundays and Mondays, all four services. I made it a point to be at Thursday night practice at least 45 minutes early, every single time. In my head, I always felt like the weak link in a mega church full of talented musicians, so I made up for it the only way I knew how: I gave 110%. Every week. No exceptions.

My kids watched me on that stage giving everything I had. My family saw exactly how important it was to me to serve the Lord with all my heart and all my mind, even — especially — while my own life was falling apart in other ways.

One week I was really struggling, and I opened up to our lead guitar player, Phil, who was about 20 years younger than me. I told him how I was wrestling with some of the music, and how I still felt like the weak link in the band. What he said back to me has stuck with me ever since.

He called me **Mr. Dependable**. He said I was always the first one there and the last one to leave. That I helped wherever I could, however I could. That the place just wouldn't be the same without me.

That landed on me in a way I wasn't expecting. It fed my soul. It reminded me that the little things — the showing up early, the staying late, the being there when it wasn't glamorous — actually matter. I wasn't hitting home runs on that stage. I wasn't the flashiest player up there. But Phil and others were watching, and my consistency was quietly shaping people around me without me even realizing it.

That's the piece Dr. Chasteen was preparing me for without either of us knowing it. The consistent hitter isn't just avoiding strikeouts for his own stat line — his steadiness becomes something other people can lean on, learn from, and build their own game around. I couldn't see it while I was in it, because I was too busy feeling like the weak link. It took someone younger, watching from the outside, to name what my consistency was actually doing.

Woody and Buzz: The Same Lesson, Different Story

Toy Story is really telling the same story from the other side of the mentorship relationship.

Woody has already built the order. He knows the rules of the room, he's earned Andy's trust over years, and his value is precisely in his consistency — he's the one who never breaks character, never lets the kid down, never swings wildly and leaves the team exposed. Buzz shows up with total conviction, a mission, and zero doubt. He is, in essence, a home run swing wearing a space suit — all conviction, no restraint, ready to fly out a window because he genuinely believes he can.

Woody's first instinct — and it's every mentor's first temptation — is to *correct the delusion*. "You are a toy." Flat. Final. Deflating. And it doesn't work, because it isn't wisdom, it's just correction. It's a strikeout lecture with no batting tip attached.

The real mentorship moment in that movie doesn't happen until Woody stops trying to be right and starts trying to be useful. He doesn't extinguish Buzz's fire. He redirects it. By the end, Buzz is still bold, still fearless, still swinging big — he's just swinging *with the team* instead of *against it*. Woody didn't make Buzz smaller. He gave Buzz a target worth hitting.

That's the whole art of mentoring a Buzz: you don't quench the fire in his belly. You give the fire a furnace to burn in instead of a room to burn down.

A few ways that looks in practice:

- **Don't correct the swing — name the situation.** Instead of "stop taking big risks," it's "this at-bat calls for contact, not distance." Buzz doesn't need less confidence; he needs to learn *when* the confidence should show up as a home run swing and when it should show up as quiet execution.
- **Let them fail small before they fail big.** Woody lets Buzz discover the truth through experience (the failed flight, the arm coming off) rather than argument. A mentor creates safe strikeouts so the mentee doesn't take a fastball to the face in a moment that actually matters.
- **Affirm the identity, redirect the belief.** Buzz's confidence wasn't the problem — his belief that he was literally a space ranger was. Chasteen never told me to stop being a home-run swinger. He told me *when* to be one. The gift, not the flame, needed shaping.
- **Earn the right to correct by investing first.** Woody only gets through to Buzz after real relationship — shared danger, shared stakes, mutual rescue. Correction without relationship reads as rejection. Correction after investment reads as love.

Bringing It Home

We need to mentor the same way right now. When someone has got the Buzz energy — the ball of fire, ready to take on the world, convinced he can fly. Your job isn't to hand someone a batting average and tell them to shrink their swing. It's to be the Woody in the room — or the Dr. Chasteen, or the Phil to somebody else's Mr. Dependable — who's earned enough trust to say, "I know you can hit it out of the park. Let me help you learn when."

And it's worth remembering: you don't always know which player you are at the moment. I didn't see myself as anything but the weak link on that stage. It took Phil naming it out loud for me to understand that showing up, early and faithful, week after week, was its own kind of home run — just one that plays out over a season instead of a single swing.

Babe Ruth never stopped swinging for the fences. He just got wiser about which pitches deserved that swing. That's not a smaller life. That's a longer one.

"Do not quench the Spirit."

1 Thessalonians 5:19