

LEE WARREN

# Bible Study

How Major Leaguers Handle the Change-Ups

Major League Baseball players leave their homes in mid-to-late February every year for spring training, and the earliest they return home on a regular basis, barring injury, is late September. Players on teams that make the playoffs might not make it home until the end of October. Some players don't stop there. They go on to play in fall or winter leagues.

Since this makes regular church attendance nearly impossible for the majority of the year, how do Christian players stay strong spiritually when they can't get to church? And who challenges them to dig into the Bible? People like Jeff Totten, the Baseball Chapel leader of the Detroit Tigers.

## Baseball Chapel

Headquartered in Philadelphia, Baseball Chapel has appointed chapel leaders for more than thirty major league baseball teams, and their farm teams, since 1973.

Every Sunday, Baseball Chapel conducts services: one for the home team, one for the visiting team, and one for umpires. Baseball Chapel uploads materials for chapel leaders to download in English and Spanish each week and give to players. The chapel leaders are free to speak about whatever God lays on their hearts.

A couple of times per year, the chapel leaders work through entire books of the Bible. “You can’t cover an entire chapter in twenty minutes,” Totten points out. “But it gives the players some continuity that says, ‘Hey, this month, I know that during my four chapels I’m going to get something from Philippians all month.’ And it helps them to understand the continuity of a book in the Bible.”

Baseball Chapel leaders prepare and conduct Bible studies on the road and at home for the players. In Detroit, they offer a study for the players’ wives and girlfriends. Baseball Chapel also offers one-on-one discipleship.

“Any way you can share the gospel is important,” says Totten. “All of us as chapel leaders are there to reach some guys on a team, but we are really there to help equip players and others to study the Word on their own and then share it with others around them.”

“In 2006, during the Tigers’ playoff run, I would text six to eight guys on our team a daily Bible verse. Currently, between the Tigers, our Minor League cities, and some players who were previously on the Tigers, I’ve got about eighteen guys whom I text a verse to daily. If they are not getting into the Word on their own, it reminds them of the importance of it.”

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## Team Bible Studies

When Totten took the position with the Tigers in 1991, Frank Tanana, a starting pitcher for the Tigers at the time, was already leading a team Bible study. Four to six times a year, Totten leads Bible studies with the Tigers’ players on the road. When he isn’t able to lead the studies, Nate Robertson, a pitcher for the Tigers, fills in. They gather in a player’s room for one hour each week and go through the materials that Totten has prepared. During home games, players meet for Bible study in restaurants, homes, or at the ballpark.

The Baseball Chapel website provides dozens of free Bible studies that players and you can download and work through. Many of the studies go through the Bible chapter by chapter. Go to

[BaseballChapel.org](http://BaseballChapel.org)

Totten sees his job as not that different from any other Bible teacher. “Circumstances, situations, or a higher income may allow for easier accessibility to sinful situations, but the temptations, the struggles, the trials, and the disciplines are all the same,” says Totten. “So, we just try to share the Word of God with men who are saved by God’s grace—if they are Christians. And if they are not, then they need God’s grace. Certainly there are circumstances related to their profession that are different, but that’s almost secondary. The need to get a man into the Word of God is the same whether he is a ballplayer or a businessman.”

Pitcher Nate Robertson says that the team Bible study contributes to his growth as a believer. “We have probably six or seven guys who go to the study. The study builds you up. You can get real stagnant in this routine. What we do is so routine and demanding that you need to have time set aside for Bible study.”



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During the 2008 season, Totten led several topical studies, including one on hell. He knew it wasn't a topic that people like to think about, but he wanted players to know what the Bible has to say about it anyway.



Totten uses several Bible study resources for the team. One of them is *Growing Strong in God's Family* by the Navigators, which includes studies on how to begin the Christian life, the importance of obedience, and the importance of God's Word. The studies also include corresponding Bible verses that players can memorize. He also likes to use *30 Days to Understanding the Bible* by Max Anders, which covers the eras of the Bible and many basic Christian doctrines.

For personal Bible study, Totten encourages players to bookmark websites such as BibleGateway.com, Carm.org and RBC.org. He has also given away at least a dozen copies of Logos Bible Software's Bible Study Library to players.

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Lee Warren writes for Baptist Press Sports, is the author of three books, and co-owns a business designed to help writers get published, called A Write Start. Learn more about Lee by visiting [LeeWarren.net](http://LeeWarren.net)


## The Minor Leagues

Totten is responsible for overseeing the six minor league teams in the Tigers' organization, which includes traveling to Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida, New York and Michigan. Each team has their own chapel leader who works with Totten to keep everybody going in the same direction.

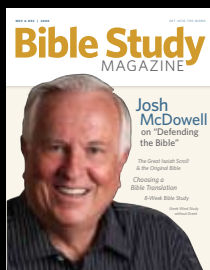
“At the minor league level, a lot of these guys are making key life decisions—like getting married, what their career path is going to be, and whether they will stick with baseball or not—and dealing with a lot of the temptations of life, which they are either going to avoid or get into,” said Totten. “So the chaplain in the Minor League city plays a key role at this pivotal point in their lives.”

The majority of minor league players never make it to the big league, or are unable to stay there if they do. “We don't just write them off,” articulates Totten. “Baseball Chapel is there to make sure those guys get connected into churches. If they want to stay in an off-season study we encourage that. There are a number of former players serving in various types of ministry. Some of them even go on to become Baseball Chapel leaders.”

And that strikes at the heart of what Totten and Baseball Chapel are trying to accomplish.

“Our goal is to see players ministered to who eventually realize that they have a role to minister to others,” Totten said. “That role could involve ministering to teammates or their families—and then using their platform to get out there and share their faith.” 

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