

T H E
M O S S Y
C R E E K
C H R O N I C L E S



CHAPTER ELEVEN



Stand Up!

Ephesians 6:15-20; John 6:56-69

It was the dog days of August. It was blazing hot, and the humidity was worse than usual. It usually stays pretty cool in Mossy Creek during the summer, but not this year. That meant football practice was harder than usual. But it wasn't just the weather. It was tough because there was a new football coach at

the high school. Coach Wheeler came to Mossy Creek with a big reputation and lots of new ideas about winning football games. Folks noticed the change in the practice schedule right away. The Mountaineers were on the field two times a day until the week before the first game. With all that heat and hard work, it wasn't long before the kids were really dragging. Excitement about a new football season vanished into the haze covering the mountains.

But the kids stuck it out. And when the season started, they were ready right on time. And it was a big time. On that first Friday night, everyone forgot all of those long, hard practices. The high school parking lot was full. The stands were overflowing. The Mountaineers were playing Madison County. They were always good. After the Mountaineers beat 'em 35-0, everybody agreed that a win was a win, but this one was special. Coach Wheeler's new ideas were starting to look pretty good. People were wondering, "If we beat Madison that bad, what's next?" It didn't take long to find out.

Jackson was waiting in the high school parking lot for Stevie Ray after the game. Stevie Ray was the starting tight end for the Mountaineers. When he came out of the locker room, he was showered and wearing a suit with a white shirt and a tie. That was one of Coach Wheeler's new ideas everybody liked. The kids looked good and played well. Stevie Ray looked fidgety as he and Jackson drove home. After a while he cleared his throat and said, "We've got football practice tomorrow mornin'." Well, that was news to Jackson. "What are y'all going to be doing the day after a game?" he asked. Stevie Ray said, "Watchin' film from tonight's game and film of Johnston County for next week's

game. We're comin' in at 9 and leavin' at lunchtime." Jackson was quiet for a moment and then said, "Alright. Your chores can wait 'til you get home." But that wasn't the end of it, not by a long shot.

Stevie Ray said, "We've got practice on Sunday, too. We're gonna be liftin' weights and then walkin' through some new things we're doin' for Johnston County." That got Jackson's attention. "When?" he asked. "Same as Saturday," Stevie Ray replied nervously, "From 9 to lunch." Jackson said, "I don't know about that. Your momma will never sit still for that." "But, Dad, Coach Wheeler said he won't recommend us to college recruiters if we don't practice on the weekends. And he thinks I've got a shot at a scholarship." Jackson knew he was going to need some help getting Stevie Ray through college. But he sure didn't want to get it the wrong way. And practicing on Sunday? That was wrong. But he and Stevie Ray hadn't gotten home before he started wondering how much his principles might cost him.

The next day he sent Sandy to pick Stevie Ray up from football practice. After they got home, he jumped in his truck and rode out to the high school. The gym doors were still propped open. He walked across the gym floor to the coaches' offices. Coach Wheeler was talking to one of his assistant coaches when Jackson knocked on the door jam. After his assistant coach left, Coach Wheeler invited Jackson to have a seat. "How are you doin', Mr. Yates?" Coach Wheeler asked. "Can't complain," Jackson replied. "But I've got a problem. Stevie Ray says y'all are practicin' tomorrow, tomorrow mornin'. I can't have him

doin' that. His mother and I are agreed that he has to be at church tomorrow. We don't feel like we can compromise on that."

Coach Wheeler rocked back in his chair and smiled. "Tomorrow's practice isn't mandatory. Stevie Ray can miss if he needs to." Jackson look relieved. But he was still bothered. He said, "Stevie Ray is sayin' if he misses Sunday practices you won't put in a good word for him to college recruiters. I didn't know he was good enough to get a scholarship. But if he is, I sure would like for him to get one." Coach Wheeler laced his fingers together and said, "Well, Mr. Yates, there's a good reason for that. College programs go seven days a week." Jackson did not know that. He thought college teams practiced Monday to Friday and played on Saturday. The rest of his conversation with Coach Wheeler went just fine, but nothing changed. No Sunday practice, no help with a scholarship.

The next day, Jackson, Sandy, and Stevie Ray were the last people to visit with Pastor Marianne after church. Jackson explained their problem. Pastor Marianne arched her eyebrows and said, "You really are in a fix." Sandy fumed, "It's ridiculous!" Jackson nodded his head in agreement. Stevie Ray looked like he was looking for somewhere to hide. Pastor Marianne went on, "What you're trying to do reminds me of something Paul suggests—be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power." Sandy exclaimed, "I know that verse." Then she frowned and asked, "Doesn't the rest of it have something to do with the Devil?" Pastor Marianne laughed and said, "Yes, it does. Paul says, 'Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all of the Devil's tricks and

strategies.” Stevie Ray interjected, “I don’t think Coach Wheeler is the Devil.” Pastor Marianne smiled and said, “You’re right. I wasn’t saying that. But there are some other ways of understanding what Paul means. If you’ve got some time, let’s talk about it.”

A few minutes later, they were sitting in Pastor Marianne’s office. She handed Sandy, Jackson and Stevie Ray copies of the pew Bibles she kept in her office. She said, “Take a look at Ephesians 6.” Everyone started leafing through their Bibles. Pastor Marianne continued, “This is where Paul talks about the Devil’s tricks and strategies. Then he says ‘we aren’t fighting against human enemies, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world.’” Jackson asked, “Unseen world—what is he talkin’ about?”

Pastor Marianne said, “For Paul, God’s enemies live in a spiritual world we can’t see. That’s who he thinks we’re fighting against. But here is another way of seeing that same thing: we’re fighting against the selfish and rebellious things in us we don’t always see. It’s the stuff that doesn’t want to do what Jesus wants us to do. The unseen enemies we’re fighting are in us. How do we get to the point where we’re ignoring them, standing up for Jesus, and doing what He wants? When we figure that out and start winning that battle, we’re defeating the things that are fighting God. That’s how we drive off the spiritual darkness in us. And I think you can call that darkness the Devil.”

Sandy looked puzzled and asked, “Are you sayin’ somebody is being selfish here?” Jackson grouched, “Seems to me Coach Wheeler is. The more scholarship players he coaches, the better his reputation is goin’ to be. If he’s

climbin' the ladder, that's how he's gonna get his next big paycheck." Sandy thought out loud, "He's tryin' to get Stevie Ray to think that way. That's what this scholarship stuff is all about. He's tryin' to get his way by makin' sure there's somethin' in this for everybody. We never saw it." She turned, looked at Stevie Ray and said, "You're goin' to college one way or the other. A scholarship isn't gonna change that." Stevie Ray said, "Everybody's got an idea about what I should be doin'. Do I get a say?"

Pastor Marianne said, "Sure! What do you think about all of this?" Stevie Ray said, "This morning you said Jesus asked the disciples if they were goin' to quit on Him. And some people did. And after they did, He asked His disciples, 'Are you going to leave, too?' It sounds like quittin' on your coach is a bad thing." Pastor Marianne asked Stevie Ray, "But what did the disciples say?" He thought a second and said, "They asked Jesus where else they could go. They said He had the words of eternal life." "That's right," Pastor Marianne said. "That day they committed themselves to Him no matter what. What was in it for them? A lot of hard work. But they decided to take Jesus' word on what He was promising." Stevie Ray thought a second and asked, "Well, how am I supposed to be committed to Jesus and give Coach Wheeler my best?"

Sandy looked back at the Bible she was reading. "Look at what Paul says. He says 'Stand your ground.' You know right from wrong. And you know you're goin' to college one way or the other." Jackson added, "And if you're good enough o get a scholarship, you're good enough to walk on. Lots of people get

scholarships that way. Son, if the Lord wants you playing college football, He'll make a way."

Pastor Marianne asked Stevie Ray, "Why don't you answer your own question? How are you going to stay committed to the Lord and play football, too?" He stood up to leave and said, "I guess I'll trust the Lord. I'll tell Coach Wheeler I'm going to give him my best six days of the week and do my best for the Lord on Sunday. If Sunday school and church is where we practice bein' Jesus' disciples, then I've gotta be here or I'll be quittin' on Him." Pastor Marianne smiled and said, "Great answer. Commitment means standing up for what's right. It sounds like you've got that figured out."

Well, on Monday Stevie Ray came to school early. He wasn't looking forward to it, but he had to explain to Coach Wheeler what he was going to do before he lost his nerve. When he found him, Stevie Ray asked him, "Coach, can I talk to you a minute?" He said, "Sure. Come on in my office." Once they got there, he offered Stevie Ray a seat. But he just stood there and started right in on what he had to say. "Coach, I want to be the best football player I can. I want us to win district and go to the state playoffs. I wanna play college ball. But football is just one part of my life. And I've gotta stand up for what I believe. If I don't do that now, I'll never get it right. I'll give you my best. But I've gotta give the Lord what I owe Him, too. If I quit on Him now, it'll just keep gettin' easier and easier to do. Bein' here on Sunday—that's the same as quittin' on Jesus, and I can't do that."

Coach Wheeler looked right at Stevie Ray and said, “I admire your courage. Not everybody could do what you just did. So you’re goin’ to pad up six days a week for the Mountaineers and...” “And put on the whole armor of God on Sunday so I can stand up for Jesus. What else can I do?” Stevie Ray asked. Coach Wheeler smiled and said, “Well, if you can stand up to me, I imagine you won’t have too much trouble standin’ up for Jesus.” Amen.

