

# Humber Uses Perfect Game to Glorify a Perfect God

It's perhaps the loneliest feeling in baseball.

It's the 7th inning and you've got a perfect game going. And nobody wants to talk to you.

Not your manager. Not your teammates. Even the batboy is nowhere to be found.

But on one unlikely Saturday afternoon in Seattle, White Sox pitcher Philip Humber welcomed the silent treatment.

"I remember sitting in the dugout and I got this feeling that it might happen," the Christian athlete said.

Nerves racing, adrenaline pumping, Humber decided to give it all over to God with a **simple prayer**: "Lord if this is Your will for it to happen, just use me to glorify You through it."

And it happened all right—only the 21st perfect game in baseball history: a 96-pitch, 4-0 masterpiece that ended with a chaotic check-swing strikeout to Mariners' Brendan Ryan.

For a split second, just before his White Sox teammates mobbed him in a celebration at the pitcher's mound, Humber collapsed to the ground, his head buried in his hands.

"I just fell to my knees and thanked God," he said. "As soon as I got up, my teammates were all over me. It's a moment I'll never forget."

Humber's self-proclaimed "15 minutes of fame" included a phone call from President Obama, a guest appearance on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, and then a congratulatory Tweet from fellow devout Christian **Tim Tebow**.

"Things [like] that definitely are not normal," said Humber, whose wife, Kristen, gave birth to the couple's first son, John Gregory, 10 days after the perfect game. "It's such a blessing. It's something you can't even dream up happening."

But Humber handled the increased media scrutiny with grace, deflecting the glory to his Lord and Savior.

He even took to Twitter to use his new platform to help advance the Kingdom of God.

***@Philip\_Humber:** Throwing a perfect game is an awesome moment in a ballplayer's life. But it pales in comparison to knowing a truly perfect God.*

"When they're interviewing you, they want to see if this is genuine," Humber said of his faith in Christ. "Sometimes you see guys point to the sky after a home run. But they're trying to figure out how does 'religion'—as a lot of people refer to it—affect your baseball."

Humber doesn't flinch.

"It's been neat to explain that it's a relationship," he said. "And it doesn't change, whether I'm at my job or I'm in church or wherever I'm at. I'm always acknowledging that Christ is my Savior and I'm serving God."

As the grandson of two Texas small-town Baptist preachers, it isn't a stretch to say that Humber actually grew up in church.

"I was in church every time the doors were open," he said.

But Humber insists it wasn't just at church that he learned about God. He credits his parents for their example of what it means to have a relationship with Christ.

"My parents really lived it out," he said. "They showed me a good example of what a follower of Christ is supposed to look like."

And by age 8, Humber was ready to receive Christ in his life. "At a young age like that I knew I was a sinner," he said. "I prayed that God would forgive me of my sins and I asked Christ to come into my life.

"But as you get older, it becomes more real to you. As you go through the struggles of life and different challenges and you get out on your own, you're going to have to make decisions about your faith."

All Humber wanted was just a little bit of spotlight.

He even tried to bargain with God during one point in his struggling career. "If you give me that platform, maybe get me on (ESPN's) SportsCenter, I'll really glorify You there."

Forget aspirations about a perfect game. Just getting to the big leagues was a task so tall, Humber himself wondered if it would ever happen.

A well-decorated pitcher out of Rice University, Humber was drafted by the New York Mets, third overall in 2004.

But his road would quickly find plenty of hairpin turns. After mediocre stints in Port St. Lucie (A) and Binghamton (AA), Humber was shut down in 2005 after 74 1/3 innings to undergo reconstructive Tommy John elbow surgery.

Sidelined for a year, he battled back through rehab and was awarded two short cups of coffee with the Mets—2 innings and 7 innings—in 2006 and 2007.

Humber was then traded to the Twins as one of the main pieces for Johan Santana, one of baseball's prized pitchers. But for the next two years he struggled with high expectations in the Twins organization and could never get his ERA under . He was eventually waived in 2009.

Kansas City signed and waived him in 2010. Same with Oakland, who waived him in January 2011, when the White Sox took a

flier on him.

At this point, Humber had been called up five times over by three teams, making 26 major league appearances over five seasons.

But he wasn't sticking anywhere.

"Going up and down from the big leagues to the minor leagues—just fighting that—I got to the point where I was questioning God," he said. "I'm trying to do things the right way, and live the right way. These other guys are going out and partying and doing this and that. Why do they get to move up and I'm not?"

God finally penetrated his heart. He was asking the wrong question.

"Instead of asking God, 'How can I be used for your kingdom,' I'm asking Him, 'Why are You allowing this to happen?'"

Looking back, it all makes perfect sense to the 6-foot-4 righty.

"Sometimes when God kind of puts us out in the desert a little bit, giving us time to be by ourselves, we're not necessarily ready to be used," he said. "He has to shape us and mold us.

"It's hard as human beings when we're living our lives to trust Him. Just because things aren't working out exactly how I think they might doesn't mean God's not in charge."

Every time Humber picks up his glove, he is reminded.

Colossians 3:23 is inscribed on his glove in big letters and it brings the focus back to where it belongs: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not human masters" (NIV).

"A lot of people say and write stuff about you," said Humber,

who is involved with a team chapel service on Sundays and Bible study on Tuesdays. "You start to try to impress them or please them. And it's not just in sports, it's in other areas of life where we're worried about what other people are thinking about us."

Whether it's whirling a perfect game or getting hammered for 9 runs the next outing against the Boston Red Sox, Humber has learned that his value does not come from statistics and accolades.

It's in the person of **Jesus**.

"If we're doing it for the Lord and His pleasure, we're going to get a whole lot more satisfaction and peace, knowing that we gave it our best effort," Humber said, "and knowing our heavenly Father is looking down on us and is just as proud as He could possibly be, regardless of a result or a statistic."

Growing up in Nacogdoches, Texas, Humber had many godly role models to look up to. But for him, one person who stood the test of time for his faithfulness to the Lord was Billy Graham.

"I remember watching the Crusades on TV and how many lost souls came to Jesus as a result of preaching the Gospel," Humber said. "He's definitely someone who as a Christian, as a follower of Christ, you can look up to and appreciate all that he did to further the kingdom."

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