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CHANGING SEASONS FOR CUBS' COGHLAN BY ANDY W. CLAPP

With every new season, a renewed sense of hope emerges from the past seasons of pain and suffering. In life, we have seasons of loss and struggles that eventually give way to seasons of incredible joy and successes.

Baseball also has its seasons. But for the Chicago Cubs, the seasons of struggles have amassed to a point other franchises could never imagine, having last won the World Series in 1908.

This season has a sense of hope with new manager Joe Maddon, renowned President of Baseball Operations Theo Epstein, and phenom Kris Bryant expected to make an impact on this season as well.

In a *BusinessWeek* article discussing the shift in the Cubs business model, Ira Boudway wrote, "Last fall, Epstein let fans know that the Cubs' goal for this year is to win the National League Central Division. Maddon is thinking World Series."

A key component to their success this year is left-fielder, former first round draft pick Chris Coghlan.

Coghlan understands the ever-changing seasons of life. While at Ole Miss, Coghlan admitted a lack of humility. "I was every bit of cocky and egotistical as you could get, so the better I did the more my ego grew and the more of myself I worshipped," he told *Unashamed Athletes*.

When he was called up to the

Majors in 2009, although he struggled at the plate during the first half of the season, the Florida native went on to be the team's leader in hits, batting .372 over the remainder of the season, and in doing so earned the NL Rookie of the Year Award.

After a stellar rookie season, one would think Coghlan's career would take off. Instead, he would see more time in the minor leagues battling through several injuries, including to his knee and back.

In 2014 when Coghlan wasn't offered a contract by the Miami Marlins, the team he had spent his eight-year career with after being drafted in 2006, a new season

began for him.

As a free agent, he signed with the lovable, but championship-starved Chicago Cubs. Now, the 29-year-old is helping lead the charge to break the "Curse of the Billy Goat."

To know Chris, however, one must look beyond the batter's box and see the prologue to the story of this season.

In 2001, the 15-year-old found himself in an unwanted season. His father Tim, a former SWAT Team member in the Montgomery County police force, was tragically killed in an accident — something Chris struggled to accept. He was only 46. His father would not be there

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by Lailani Mendoza

"What are you doing? Let me go!"

The homeless girl screamed as a group of infuriated farmers grabbed her wrists and ankles. They tied her arms and legs to the waterwheel so tight she couldn't move.

Her crime? The famished youngster had stolen a few onions.

As if being bound up wasn't enough, one farmer set the wheel spinning. Her mouth was filled with slimy water and gravel every time her head plunged underwater.

Suddenly, a man with gentle hands and a kind voice untied her. Pressing a wet cloth to the girl's face, he said, "Little girl, these people want to hurt you. Listen to me. You must live!"

The girl had a name but hadn't heard it since her Korean mother abandoned her at a train station at age four. When people saw her slightly rounder eyes and wavy hair from her American GI father, they'd call her "toogee" ("foreign devil") instead.

To find her way home, she followed the railroad track. Instead, it led to three years of extreme hunger, poverty and abuse that ultimately left her half-dead on a garbage heap. That's when a caring Swedish nurse found her and brought her to an orphanage.

Stephanie was legally adopted by David and Judy Merwin, an American missionary couple who loved her like their own birth child. "They brought me to the States. I was given a citizenship, a name, a beginning of a physical identity."

After she left the orphanage, it took a while for Stephanie to understand what it meant to be adopted. She recalls telling another girl she's not an American, that she simply lives with an American couple.

"She said, 'No, you don't just live with them, you're their daughter.' It was like this light went on."

She ran all the way home to find her parents. "I remember throwing my arms around my adopted mom, looking up into her eyes and saying 'I'm your daughter!'"

Knowing the life-changing impact of adoption, Fast

now works as a global orphan advocate and mentor to adoptees. In the 1980s, she also founded Destiny Ministries with her husband to lead people to their God-given destiny.

Raised as a pastor's kid, she'd heard the Gospel countless times: God sent His only Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross as payment for people's sins so that anyone who puts their faith in Him may be forgiven and have eternal life.

Yet it wasn't until she had a personal connection with Jesus that she understood His sacrifice.

"Until that moment, I only saw Jesus as the Son of



photo courtesy Stephanie Fast

Stephanie Fast

God," she shared in Lee Strobel's book *The Case For Grace*. "I knew He had come down to earth, but that night for the first time it dawned on me: *He understands me*. He walked in my shoes!"

"As a matter of fact, He was sort of a 'toogee.' You know? His daddy – His earthly father – wasn't His real daddy. He slept in the straw as a child. He was ridiculed and abused. They chased Him and tried to kill Him."

Fast remembers when she fully committed her life to Jesus at 19. "I basically said 'I have no strings attached.' I want to be connected to You 100 per cent ... That to me was the moment of transformation and redemption of my life."

In her riveting memoir *She Is Mine*, Stephanie Fast shares the heart-rending trauma she faced as a

war orphan and her remarkable story of overcoming the odds.

To write her autobiography, Fast visited South Korea several times to verify her childhood recollections and to give a voice to the parents she never knew.

"To actually sit down and write my childhood story was extremely painful because I had to sit in those ashes and the Lord asked me to feel all the emotions and the pain ... so that it would be a flowing story," says Fast.

She wrote it for three reasons: as a legacy for her children, as a rare firsthand orphan account, and this: "I felt like there are many people that did not walk in my shoes but have emotionally and spiritually walked in my shoes ... and God is the only one that can piece a broken child (together) with His truth and make us a whole people that He wants us to be.

"So many people connect with my story not so much because of my physical abandonment but because they identify with my emotional and spiritual abandonment," Fast tells *Living Light News*.

"We're all orphans somewhere in our lives and unless we're found, nurtured and given back our true identity (in Jesus Christ), I truly believe we all wonder.

"I always say I'm twice adopted," Fast says, referring to her parent's adoption and being adopted by God.

This spiritual adoption brought her the healing she desperately needed. When Fast accepted Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, He absorbed all her hurts, shame, guilt and sin and transformed them into something beautiful.

Now when Fast remembers the darkest moments of her life, she can see God's grace – the farmer that rescued her, the nurse that carried her from the garbage heap, her parents who adopted her.

"He was there at every stage in my life – crying with me, broken with me – but always knowing that there is another story beyond that.

"The cross says to me there is no event that I would be better without because Jesus went back and took all that the enemy stole from me. So in that point, my life is victory, not defeat."

For more information, visit stephaniefast.org.

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when Chris graduated high school or to give fatherly advice. He would not be there to see him play in the Majors or hear him exchange "I do's" with *The Bachelor's* Corrie Adamson.

Yet, Cogs would find father figures around him and a focus on baseball that helped him cope with the loss.

Coghlan trained at the Winning Inning Baseball Academy and Roy Silver, the owner of the academy, was one of the first ones to comfort him when Tim passed away. When Chris locked himself inside his room, it was Silver that Chris's mom, Heather Roefaro, turned to for help.

Silver told the *Tampa Bay Times*, "There were a lot of tears. A lot of anger. He had a real problem with the idea that he never got a chance to say goodbye." He continued, "It's one of those

moments where you realize you're living in a storm. But the good thing is we know storms never last."

Chris would use baseball to help him cope with his loss and in the process, grew as a player and gained strong Christian influences in his life in Roy Silver and the Winning Inning coaches. His mother told the *Palm Beach Post*, "Boys tend to look up to their dads and he didn't have a dad to give him any guidance. Now, God has blessed him with a number of father figures. They really helped Chris become who he is today." However, the road hasn't always been a smooth one.

After being called up to spring training, Chris injured a teammate on an errant throw after a night of drinking. He was sent back to the minors. God placed another influence in Chris's life in the minors, another ballplayer who shared the gospel with Chris.

In an "I Am Second" video, Chris explained, "One thing that I'll always remember is that, if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God

raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

"And that hit me right here. I knew it right then and there. I remember my heart just beating a thousand times per second. I realized at that time that I wanted God. I wanted Jesus. I wanted Him in my life. I was tired of chasing ... chasing the wind."

The seasons changed in Chris's life that day. "At that point God radically changed me and my heart. There were also areas that I cleaned up on the outside with things people would see such as my language, partying, and drinking. It really took a lot of work that God had to just chisel away at my heart that started exposing other issues and other sin.

"Along that journey, that's when I started to grow and it's a constant renewal daily to just die to yourself, renew your mind and stay meek and humble each day because the world exalts you."

He now has a calling to share his faith. As Roefaro told the *Tampa Bay Times*, "Out of this terrible event something wonderful has emerged."

Indeed, a new season has begun in Coghlan's life, a season which spans longer than 162 games. This season is eternal.

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