

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a golf course. In the foreground, a white golf ball sits on a wooden tee. Behind it, a golf club is partially visible, its head and shaft extending from the bottom right towards the center. The background shows a green field and a clear blue sky with some light clouds.

TIPS FOR TAKING
LIFE
AND
GOLF

TO THE
NEXT LEVEL

BILL CARLUCCI

Tips for
Taking Life
And Golf
To
The Next Level

Written by Bill Carlucci

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Tips for Taking Life and Golf to the Next Level
By William D. Carlucci

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Special thanks to my daughter Emily for her creativity, patience, and God-given talents and my daughter Leah for her patience and instinctive design talents in helping make this book a reality.

Forward

All right. I'll admit it. I'm a golfaholic. I not only love the refreshment and relaxation that it brings to my life, but I need it as an escape from the daily pressures of life. I feel withdrawal symptoms if I miss more than a few days without swinging a club. I think about the game when I'm not playing it and plan my next "fix" as I'm concluding my present one.

To make matters worse, I would have to plead guilty to a charge of spreading this compulsion to innocents along the way. As a chapel coordinator for professional sports teams in the New York metropolitan area, I have, on numerous occasions, turned a rookie on to the highs and lows of this "drug." I have witnessed, with a twisted form of pleasure, many a frustrated All-American in football or baseball whack with futility "that little white ball." And it is my custom to find that ray of hope in a neophyte's swing and sing its praises in hopes that my cheers will convince the poor soul that he is but a few swings away from the greatness of another sport.

Despite the negative effects of my addiction, I have experienced the wonderful moral and spiritual growth on the links. I have overcome temptations, learned the art of encouraging a fellow traveler down on his luck, called on the God of all comfort, rebuked the evil one for placing a tree in my line, cared for nature by replacing my divots, and been humbled too numerous times to count. The game is simply a great mold and revealer of character.

The intricacies of the game of golf form a beautiful collage of the game of life. And it is to this end that I commend to you Bill's book "Taking Golf and Life to the Next Level." Bill Carlucci has masterfully connected the details of this great game with the details of life. He has drawn out various nuances of this challenging sport and applied the inherent lessons to the challenges and experiences I face in a typical day. I love it. In some ways, this book justifies my compulsion. But in other ways, it offers me the balance and strength I need to keep this wonderful pastime in perspective. "Taking Golf and Life to the Next Level" has also given me ammunition for conversation and "teachable moments" with some of my playing partners.

I commend to you "Taking Golf and Life to the Next Level." It will shed light along your way regardless of whether you're on or off the course. And to my fellow golfaholics, it provides hope that even in our weakness and depravity, light still shines through the darkness.

George T. McGovern
Chaplain, NY Giants
Chapel Coordinator, NY Yankees
Chaplain, NJ Nets

Testimonials

"Bill, thanks for the copy of "Taking Life and Golf to the Next Level." I am pleased to have it as part of our library."

Rev. Rick Warren
Senior Pastor – Saddleback Church
Author: "The Purpose Driven Life"
Lake Forest, California

"Great practical spiritual insights and applications for life".

Rev. Dr. John Guest
Senior Pastor-Christ Church at Grove Farm
Evangelist and Teacher
Sewickley, PA

"Reaching and discipling men takes the Grace of God and our very best creative resources. Bill Carlucci and G.O.L.F. have opened a door that is reaching hundreds of men in the Northeast. He has given the local church an exceptional resource in ministry to men and through men."

Brian Doyle,
Executive Director – Vision New England Men's Ministries &
Former New England Regional Director of Promise Keepers

"The analogies between the game of golf and game of life are striking, and G.O.L.F. effectively articulates those analogies and applies them to the spiritual development of all those who want to know and understand more about both games. An outstanding outreach ministry!"

Dean Borgman,
Retired Chief Executive Officer - Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation
Subsidiary of [United Technologies Corp.](#)

"I have been greatly blessed by the G.O.L.F. "Tips". It has helped my "game" both on and off the course! G.O.L.F. is an outreach ministry that works; it reaches golfers and non golfers--both men and women in a unique way. I think God has big plans to continue this good work to give His guidance to those who know God as well as to those whom God is seeking."

John R. Hart
Vice-Chairman Emigrant Bank
New York, N.Y.

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Taking Life *and* Golf to the Next Level

As a young caddie, it was obvious to the people who knew me that God had given me a natural ability for the game. At the age of fifteen I was shooting in the high seventies on a pretty consistent basis. Since I was self taught *and of course knew everything there was to know about everything*, I figured that it would be knowledge that would “get me to the next level” as the saying goes.

So I set off to learn the golf swing and all the mechanics. I spent hours with an old time pro who taught the late great professional Julius Boros. Problem was with my newly acquired knowledge, my score started going up instead of down. I began focusing so much on my technique that I forgot about the target. I lost my ability to feel. The only thing I found at “the next level” was the excuse of saying I was in a slump. Trust me once over-thinking starts in golf, it never ends. If you don’t believe me, read about former tour player *turned announcer* Bobby Clampett. Clampett came on tour some years back with a promising career ahead of him and then the paralysis of analysis set in and it paralyzed him. Nick Faldo winner of several major championships got so methodical that today he can’t get out of his own way. I personally knew pro’s on the regional level that got to the point where they couldn’t even swing the club back because they were so much in their heads.

It was about thirty years later that I discovered Ben Hogan would work thirty minutes each morning on the first twelve inches of the take-away, Jack Nicklaus felt ninety-percent of mis-hit shots occurred before the club was ever taken back, so he practiced the basics of his set-up for hours. Just recently Tiger Woods spent four hours with Butch Harmon working on his backswing. Whether it’s in Life or *Golf* “taking it to the next level” requires a mastering of the basics, *it’s about feeling...not knowledge*.

It’s by mastering the basics that we find out what our *natural abilities* are. It’s those natural abilities that will stand up under the pressure of competition. It’s by accepting what works best for us that mold’s the champions in golf...*not knowledge*.

It’s no different in life, especially the Christian life. Why is it that we hear the expression so often that, “there’s no better excitement than what a new Christian demonstrates?” Recently while preparing a couple of talks I had to give, I looked back at some of the talks I gave a few years back and I was blown away by the basic humility that I had at one time which has been replaced by knowledge and correctness today.

We live in a society that is so hung up on the correctness of our technique, that few of us use the natural gifts God, *who should be our target in life*, gave us. In Life like *Golf*, it’s the mastering of the basics God gave each one of us *in His image* that allows us to hold up under the pressures of life. It’s by accepting the person He created us to be *for His usefulness* no matter what society may think of us that molds us into His disciple while we’re playing the Country Club of Life on this earthly tour.

Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, mind, and soul...And love your neighbor as yourself. Just think how solid our life's basics need to be just to meet the "ALL". We can spend a lifetime just trying to master that basic. How well we can quote the Bible, the fishes on our cars, and the use of Christian code certainly doesn't impress God *since "He" equips the called* and it has been my experience that those who don't share our faith or beliefs kind-a think we're obnoxious anyway. If we're in our heads, we can't be in our hearts, and just like in golf...there goes the ability to feel, and that's exactly what people are looking for most today.

Our mission here at G.O.L.F. is to bring Christ to people in an authentic and credible way. Here's the basic we try to master, "We love *and care* because He first loved *and cared for* us! **1 John 4:19**

Next week, ***Taking It To The Next Level*** Through "The Grip" The Stance" and "The Set-up" in Life and Golf.

Recently, I spent a day in paradise. The house was empty and I turned on The Golf Channel and proceeded to watch six uninterrupted lessons with Bobby Jones and then I took playing lessons from Mark Brooks, Bruce Lietzke, John Cook, Tom Lehman, and Tommy Bolt. One of the expressions that I seemed to hear starting with Jones right through to Bolt (8 hours of ecstasy), was how they stressed the importance of the basics and how it is through building sound basics you "*find what works for you.*" They all said it exactly the same way... "*Find What Works for You!*" By the way at eighty-something, Tommy Bolt was the most impressive of the playing lessons. There was no doubt that out of all these fine professionals, Jones and Bolt were focusing on target, while the young bucks were mentally entangled in sports psychology, breathing techniques for the pressure and various drills, where Jones and Bolt had that old fashion fire-in-the-belly and, if you blinked, you missed their shot. Just as an aside...I've written several times about the reputation Tommy Bolt earned because of his temper. While the sports writers say its exaggerated here's a cute story Tommy says never really happened but some of the other players have another opinion.

Tommy was looking over his approach shot to the eighteenth green during a round and said to his caddie, "Give me the four iron." His caddie replied, "Mr Bolt, It's gotta be between the seven iron and the putter because they're the only two clubs you have left." Sounds to me like an exaggeration also, but how many of us find ourselves out of resources with which to play the game of life? I think that answer is *most people*, since we are so overwhelmed by life today and our lives are so crowded. Maybe if we go back to the basics we can we can begin to simplify things.

Let's take a look at the ***Grip, Stance, and Set-up*** for playing Life and Golf...

Life		Golf
Piety: Piety is not a stuffy term for a holier-than-thou type of person, but it is a life of faith and trust in God. Piety is based on our belief that putting our lives in God's <i>perfect grip</i>, will actually increase our power and take us to that next level of wisdom since piety is where we find the Holy Spirit.	<i>The Grip</i>	When taking it to the next level in golf, the correct grip is a must. However, at first it is uncomfortable and unnatural. But if you stick with it you will end up hitting the ball straighter and farther than ever before." Isn't that the same way we live our lives before we find piety, gripping them too strong? We go after the power and then whether we realize it or not, our lives become unmanageable and we're deceived into thinking we're in control.
Study: The Bible is the principle means thru which God speaks to us – revealing Himself and His will for our lives. It's by knowing His word through the power of the Holy Spirit that we will find our <i>stance</i> on the issues life throws at each one of us.	<i>The Stance</i>	Ben Hogan discovered that the precise angle of his feet determined the flight of the ball. By turning his front toe more to the target and squaring the inside of his back foot, he was able to keep his back swing shorter putting less strain on his back and, best of all, he was now hitting a fade. How meticulous have you been with your stance on life? By studying God's word, <i>What have you come to stand for? How do you use your money? Your time? Your talents?</i> Businesses spend big money on positioning statements, what's yours for your life? What's your family's'?
Action: Christian action is the movement outside of oneself which is an expression of piety and study. It is through piety and study that we find <i>"What works for us...Our God-given gifts"</i> It through piety and study that we <i>set-up</i> our lives here on earth in service that best <i>"Works for His purpose...Our Target."</i> <i>"See A Friend!" "Be A Friend!"</i> <i>"Show Christ Your Friend!"</i>	<i>The Set-up</i>	Every setup needs a reflex to put the swing into action. It could be a forward press, a swivel of the head, or a slight pump of the back foot, but you have to get in motion so your swing will hold up under pressure. Setting up a reflex response to the pressures of life automatically sends us outside ourselves which puts the control of our lives in God's hands.

Both Life and Golf need to be built on sound basics. Without all three, we will be shaky at best. It is only when we learn to overcome ourselves and that plaguing self-centeredness, that the real,

eternal, and un-perishable “*you*” can take shape. It’s not until we overcome ourselves both in *Life and Golf* by getting out of our heads and begin playing with feel by accepting the person God created us to be *for His glory*, that He will release to us the Power to “*Take it to the next level*” in either game”

Meditation: The essence of sin is a shift from God-dependence to self-dependence. The essence of salvation is a denial of self.

A man came back from a Christian retreat, and a friend asked him what it was like. He answered, "I died!" "What do you mean?" his friend responded. "This weekend I discovered that I spent my whole life hiding. I had never *really* been honest with anyone - my family, friends, myself, and most important...even God. The worst part of all this was, I wasn't even in touch with my distorted view of the truth. This past weekend all my lies died; the old hiding places in my life collapsed. I am so glad I went through this death experience to become a new person, now I know what it means to be ‘born again’."

Ask Yourself: Have I *really* come to my last days?

The Clubs

Let's begin learning to use the clubs we need for playing the game of life. Let's start with a little history.

In the earliest days of golf on the eastern coast of Scotland, players used primitive equipment to play the game in a rather haphazard and casual manner. A set of clubs at the time consisted of a set of play clubs (long-noses) for driving, fairway clubs (or grassed drivers) for medium shots, spoons for short range shots, niblicks (similar to today's wedges) and a putting cleek.

Since World War II, golf club development has been influenced by research into synthetic and composite materials. The casting method of manufacturing club heads was introduced in 1963. This made clubs more affordable than ever. However, professional golfers continue to use hand forged clubs because of their increased "feel" and therefore control.

Now, let's take a look at the history behind the clubs used to play the game of life. Author M. Scott Peck calls it the greatest event of the twentieth century...The "founding" of Alcoholics Anonymous in Akron Ohio on June 10, 1935 by a NY City stockbroker jobless at the time and a surgeon who needed a drink to steady his scalpel.

The stockbroker a man by the name of Bill Wilson who was quite adverse to religion I might add, was asked to attend a meeting at a Manhattan rescue mission sponsored by the Calvary Episcopal Church known as the Oxford Group. Dr. Frank Buchman, a Lutheran minister, was the founder of the Oxford Group (a Bible study group), which in turn became a source of the life transforming Twelve Steps in the recovery process.

At a church conference I attended I heard Bill Hybels pastor of the famous Willow Creek Church tell about a conversation he had with his good friend world renown consultant Peter Drucker, where Drucker told him, "I finally found the one thing in the world that really helps *ALL* people...The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous." Drucker went on to tell Hybels, "If the church would re-adopt their principals, they might begin really helping people again."

How many of us play the game of life in a rather haphazard and casual manner? We're never really happy and at peace, never really satisfied with our successes, and we continue to complicate life through and some of today's methods that promise to microwave our lives into shape all for control and success.

Our set of clubs for playing the game of life consist of steps of surrender for driving, and self-examination for the fairway woods and long irons; acknowledgement of character defects for medium shots; restitution for harm done (confession) for the short range shots, and reaching out to others (which will include 2 of the Promises of AA) for the short game, rounding out our bag of fourteen clubs. The goal of these clubs is to provide a simple approach to playing life and to provide a true peace that radiates to all with whom we come in contact.

The Driver

“Grip It & Rip It!”

The most feared of all the clubs in the bag has always been the driver. It's the life-blood of the golf game. “Grip It & Rip It”, “Let the Big Dog Eat”, just a couple of phrases used to explain the ecstasy of seeing a tee shot sail out of sight. To give us that fix, the manufacturers have tried everything: drivers with smaller and shallow heads, offset style heads, persimmon and laminated wood heads, metal and titanium heads, steel, aluminum, graphite, and various compositions of shafts. Every ball is the longest and all for what? POWER & CONTROL.

Golfers have been searching for the secret behind the driver for years. Yet, almost every one of us can remember that one drive where we admitted we would give up our desperate quest for power and control, take a nice smooth swing, and “just meet the ball” and we ended up hitting our career tee shot.

It's no different as we play the game of life, is it? We try every new fad we can find to help us knock life out of sight. We addictively hunger for POWER & CONTROL, sometimes at a very dear cost to ourselves and our loved ones don't we? Hitting the driver is tough and life is equally as tough at times. Let's examine why.

We live in an imperfect world. Some feel they've been hurt by God, and many people have hurt us. Let's not forget how we've hurt ourselves and others. Like the Bible tells us, “we all sin and fall short of the glory of God.” Why can't we just accept this point? Admit our powerlessness as humans and just go at life easier, meet it squarely, and play it right down the middle instead of always flirting with the out-of-bounds stakes.

As we play the game of life, the driver is step one. *We admit we are powerless and that our lives are unmanageable on our own.* Some years back I was a member of a small group where one man said, “If I'm going to give up the control of my life, I need a guarantee about God.” Another quick-witted member of the group replied, “Ok, here's the guarantee: I guarantee you, you're not Him.” If you don't think you're powerless and your life is unmanageable, take the following test:

- Do you ever stay up late when you know you need sleep?
- Do you ever try to get up early when you're tired and just can't get out of bed?
- How many diets and exercise routines have you begun in your life?
- How many times have you known what was the right thing to do, only to not do it?
- Have you ever tried to control another person or situation only to find it was uncontrollable?
- Do you ever promise your family or anyone else that you will be home for dinner or attend another function only to show up late...or not at all?
- How about the endless promises to our children? “I promise I'll be at the game next time. You know that you're more important than my job.”

After answering “yes” to one or more of these questions, don’t be discouraged. Welcome yourself to the human race and admit you are powerless, that your life is unmanageable, and that you need to begin thinking about coming to grips with the fact that there is a Power greater than you who can run your life much better than you can.

The #3 Wood / Metal

Trust the Club...Not the Obvious

Understanding the dynamics behind the 3 Wood is the key to being able to successfully utilize its depth and flexibility. Having spent years on the practice tee, I can tell you that the biggest mistake most golfers make with this club is they try to scoop the ball by picking it cleanly, figuring that will lift the ball into the air. This approach causes them to lose their balance by falling back, and the result...frustration. Golf has been called "The Game of Opposites" and in this case, the obvious is just the opposite.

In order to get the most from this club, the golfer must meet the ball with a downward motion, popping the ball off its lie and sailing it towards the target. In order to consistently do this, the golfer must identify the bottom of their swing

The Second Step in the 12-Step Program and our 3 Wood is, "came to believe that a *Power* greater than myself can restore me to sanity." Sanity? I'm certainly not insane, so why would I need this? For this purpose, insanity is defined as, "repeating a past negative behavior or action and expecting a positive result." If you think you haven't done this, pull out the tip on "The Driver" and come clean. No one could have answered "no" to the question posed. So it's time to "to believe" that there's something out there bigger and more powerful than you who can help.

Most of you will have no problem with this. A Gallup poll tells us that there aren't many atheists anymore. Gallup surveys tell us that 96% of Americans say, "I believe in God"; less than 2% of people say, "I'm an atheist." The survey discovered that there are far fewer atheists today than there were 50 years ago. Why? We know more about the universe today than we did 50 years ago. The more scientific discoveries we have, the more we find out about this universe and therefore fewer people are willing to stick their neck out and say, "I believe it all just happened by random accident." With computers that can list odds of all these things "just happening", it takes more faith not to believe in a Creator than it does to believe in one.

The Second Step in this recovery is not just to acknowledge His existence, but to understand His character. What is He really like? Until we know what God is really like, we can't trust Him. We're not going to trust something or someone that we don't know about. He is a God of love not the task master figure with whom many of us grew up.

I'm writing this tip while sitting in a hotel in Boston and in the background, I hear the news reporting about this whole ENRON disaster and its first top employee has committed suicide and I'm reminded... What's the antidote to denial? What makes me finally face up to my problems? God's antidote for denial is pain. We rarely change when we see the light. We change when we feel the heat. We don't change until our fear of change is exceeded by the pain. Most people never really move into recovery until they're forced to move into it, because there is no other option. Some, unfortunately, move to an unfavorable option because their pain gets too blinding.

So how do you plan to proceed through life? Seizing things back when they don't happen

according to the “Gospel of Me”? Trying to pick when we will come clean with God while continuously falling back and losing the balance in our lives? Or will we “believe” in that “Greater Power” that will help us come to the “bottom of ourselves.”

The #5 Wood/Metal

“Let Go & Let God!”

The 5 wood was invented as one of the game’s first utility clubs. Due to the club’s length and loft, it was proven to be easier to hit than the long irons. It was especially invaluable for hitting from the ruff which could only be accomplished if the golfer had lumberjack-like strength. We’re told that the way to hit a shot from the ruff is to open the blade of the club head (because the club will close up at impact), don’t ground the club (so you don’t hit anything on the back swing that will close the club head), widen your stance for more stability, and then make a swing that may throw your back out. Knowing this, most smart golfers never really got the most from this shot and played at a disadvantage--never being able to reach full potential. However, thanks to the 5 wood and the many new utility woods that have been added, the playing field has been neutralized considerably. However, to take full advantage of these clubs, golfers must *make a decision* to make this change.

Our 5 wood for playing the game of life is, “Made a decision to turn my *will* and my *life* over to the care of God, *as I understood Him*.” I’ve been hearing for years that people in churches are saying “I’ve given my life to God” (or Jesus Christ as we understand Him to be here at G.O.L.F.) However, few mention anything about giving up their will. In Step Two, (*Our 3 Wood*) we said that we need not to only acknowledge His existence, but *understand His character*. God is all-loving and knows that we could not live by being good all the time, so He sent His Son to show how much He loved the world and said that those who accepted Him would have eternal life. Unfortunately, this has not been communicated very well, but it’s true. Of all the gods in history, why was His tomb the only one to be guarded so He didn’t get out?

How many of us have *made the decision* to give up our *wills* and make the change to a utility club that can allow us to compete in life at a level we’ve only been dreaming of up to this point?

So, what are the obstacles that keep us from making this decision? “Pride” will keep us from admitting we need help. “Guilt” will keep us from taking this step. “Fear” of what we might have to give up or change. “Worry” will keep us from abandoning ourselves to God’s control. “Doubt” will make us believe our faith is too small. Up to this point our main problem has been the misuse of will-power. We’ve been trying to bombard our problems rather than bringing them into agreement with God’s will for our lives. So how do I take this step? Repeat this simple prayer.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

*Courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Not my will but Yours be done.

The #1 Iron

Getting Honest

I believe it was at the American Golf Classic a number of years ago that Lee Trevino, along with two other golfers, were struck by lightning. Shortly afterwards in an interview, Lee was asked, “What will you do the next time you see lightning on the course?” Lee replied, “I’ll take my 1 iron out of the bag, hold it up to the sky and run down the fairway because even God can’t hit a 1 iron.”

Due to its straight knife-like face angle, the 1 iron will get a golfer honest really quick about just how precisely they are striking the ball. Our 1 iron is: *Made a fearless moral inventory of myself*. Believe me; this step done properly will help you get honest about just how precisely you are living your life...real quick.

Creation has given us instincts for a purpose. Without them we wouldn’t be complete human beings. However, these instincts are our greatest natural assets and can turn into physical and mental liabilities through grandiose and self-centered living. Step Four is a vigorous and painstaking effort to discover what our liabilities are. We need to know where our natural desires have warped us. If we’re going to rise above the heap in life, we need to begin striking at it with precision honesty like never before.

It’s time to lay it all on the line. This step has to do with cleaning up the past, letting go of guilt, gaining a clear conscience, learning to live guilt free and the way God wants us to live *with no more compromise*. If you’ll take this step and fearlessly search yourself you will very soon begin living a life that you only dreamed possible. It’s not easy to hit the 1 Iron and it’s not easy to take this step. On the seventy-second hole of the 1950 US Open at Merion Country Club, Ben Hogan hit what has been considered to be the most famous 1 iron shot ever. This can be yours...*if you dare*.

The #3 Iron

Coming Into Your Own

The three iron, while still a difficult long iron to hit in golfing terms is considered to be “more forgiving” than the one iron. This means that there is more loft to the club’s face angle and its overall length is an inch shorter. However, many golfers are unable to dedicate the time necessary to find the precision in their swings to hit the three iron so they rely on more utility clubs. For our purposes at *G.O.L.F.*, our three iron is: “*Admitted to God, myself, and to another human being, the exact nature of my wrongs.*” A well executed golf shot requires a precise pre-shot preparation. (See “Pre-shot Mindset” in the tips on our website.) Jack Nicklaus “went to the movies”, as he called it, and visualized a perfect shot every time he got up to the ball. If the shot did not turn out like he visualized, he wouldn’t slam the club into the bag and downgrade himself. Rather, he would replay it perfectly over and over again.

The three iron for playing the game of life is more forgiving, also. In fact, if this step is executed with precision, forgiveness and love are the freeing results and hopefully you will no longer need to use life’s utility clubs to get you through. It’s now time for you to “*go to the movies*” and share your life with Your God, Your Caddie in Life, and Yourself. Most will stop here since this is where the pros and the amateurs part ways. The amateurs rationalize it and make a longer list of excuses than their list in Step Four if they even attempted to make a list.

If you dare to take this step, you will have your ego deflated and you will hopefully stop Easing God Out, (EGO) of your life and start easing Him in. Feel the feelings and most importantly, feel the forgiveness and love. So when you “go to the movies” and replay your life, if you’ve hit some bad shots (and we all have), don’t slam the club down and downgrade yourself. Remember, our competition is “Old Slick” and he’s a dirty player and that’s exactly what he wants you to do. When you played sports as a kid, didn’t you try to get into your opponents head? Sure you did, that’s half the battle and the most fun when you succeed.

I have observed the dynamics of church groups with men and worked in a hospital with substance abuse patients. If you want to see group dynamics, sit in on one of those sessions. I’ve observed both ends of the spectrum from professionals to some of the toughest street people anywhere. My discovery was astonishing. As these people progressed through their treatment, they were able to face most tough situations. However, where most ran was in the letting go of the life-protecting survival mechanisms that had brought them through life thus far, and accepting forgiveness and love, both from God and those around them. Almost all--and especially the tough ones--would have chosen to walk into the most dangerous surroundings imaginable, go back to jail, or to the loneliness of the streets than to venture into the valley of their own feelings. The mere thought visibly petrified them.

This practice of admitting one’s defects to another person is, of course, very ancient. In fact, it has been validated in every century. This is clearly the *Confession* phase of the Caddie / Player relationship. It is only through this vital step that we can accept the fact that we can be forgiven and loved no matter what we have thought or done.

It won't be pleasant, but neither is hitting five hundred 3 irons. The winners stick to it. They sweat at it and they shake through it. The greats of the game and of life will tell you... *"In the Burnin'... Comes the Learnin'!*

The #4 Iron

Putting "Depth" Into Your Game

As a young boy growing up around a public golf course, my friends and I by no means enjoyed the best of equipment. In fact, one of our favorite games to play was a round of golf using only one club. The object of the game was to see how many different type shots we could hit with the one club. If you analyze it, the number 4 iron is straight faced enough for distance, if you hood the club you can putt with it, and I learned a trick shot as a young caddie of opening the blade, laying my hands back, and making a wedge out of the club. The number four iron is a great club to help a player learn about depth in the golf swing. Simply put, a golfer is considered to have depth if they are able to hit each club a number of different ways. Many times developing depth in the golf swing will turn a weakness into a strength. Our number four iron for playing the game of life is *"Was entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."* It's now time to start putting depth into our lives and taking those defects that have plagued us and begin accepting them by God's grace and finding our strength in them.

A well-loved clergyman was quoted as saying, "Anyone who is capable of the willingness and possesses the honesty to continually try this step, and fearlessly sees their faults *without reservation* has certainly come a long way spiritually and can be looked at as a man who is sincerely trying to grow into the image and likeness of his Creator."

Most of us were born with an abundance of natural tendencies. Arnold Palmer naturally hooked the ball. Hale Irwin naturally faded the ball. Lee Trevino and Ben Hogan turned a disastrous hook into a revered fade, which singled them out as two of the best ball strikers the game has known. We cannot expect our natural tendencies (character defects) in life to be lifted off of us. There are certainly some of life's snap hooks that need to be turned into fades, and most need to straighten out that slice so they can stop flirting with life's out of bounds lines and begin playing it right down the middle. Be prepared. Whether it's in life or golf, at the beginning, all we can expect is gradual improvement. Will you stick to it?

Some examples of life's hooks and slices could be seen as follows: Self-righteous anger is very enjoyable to some that possess it, however perverse, these people actually get satisfaction and a feeling of superiority preying on others through this defect. Gossip (certainly a favorite in most churches) is just a polite word for murder by character assassination and is very satisfying to those who are addicted to it. Envy plagues us today. Our area, in particular, is riddled in it. To a greater or lesser degree we are all infected with it. Many of us consume our days wishing for what we don't have rather than building upon a gratitude list of humility. For many of us, the cross of luxury is at best what most of us carry daily.

Your natural liabilities should have been revealed to you in steps four and five. How will you turn them into fruitful producing assets in your life? Of course you need the accountability, but you need more. You need to begin looking deep into the eyes of the One whose grave was guarded so He wouldn't get out, an event that never happened before or since. Feel His amazing grace, that love which just won't quit. Let it be the ingredient that will put the passion and

staying power into your life and enable you to “stick to it” as you move to the winner’s circle in life. If we dare say “these defects are just the way we are”, we are simply closing our minds to God’s healing grace and we are bound to finish in the ranks of life’s “also-rans.”

The #5 Iron

“In The Burnin’ Comes The Learnin’”

As we move to the mid irons, distance becomes less of a factor and accuracy rules supreme. It is usually early on in a golfer’s career where the first lesson of this fact hopefully puts humility into their game. They play a match against what is sometimes referred to as a “scraper” and they get their clocks cleaned. While dazed, they spend their near future in shock rationalizing, “how this guy beat the ball all day”, and yet scored as well as he did. They find out the hard way about the importance of depth and the importance of eliminating the shortcomings in their game. Bluntly said, as the golfer matures, they *may* discover “who they are” and if they accept it, they will develop a game around themselves and their God-given abilities. Our number five iron for playing the game of life is *“Humbly asked Him to remove my shortcomings.”* This step specifically concerns itself with humility.

Reverend Billy Graham was quoted saying...

“For many years I played the game of golf because it is so similar to the game of life, with its many obstacles, struggles, victories, conflicts, and blessings. If you’re not modest about your abilities when you start playing the game, it won’t take long for you to assume a role of humility.”

Let’s take a real hard look at this. Ben Hogan said later in his career that he found the secret to the golf swing. Well, you are now discovering the secret to successful living...humility.

Humility is the foundation to each of these steps. Without it, it is impossible to live a truly useful life. Since time began, we have demanded more from life and as soon as we succeed in getting “more”, we overdose in further grandiosity for “more” of what we feel we are entitled to. In all this striving, and much of it is well intentioned, our crippling handicap is simply a lack of humility. Lack of humility comes from a fine tuned life of self-centeredness and it cannot be turned around all at once. Just like a swing change, it takes time before a new result is experienced.

Where as one-time humility stood for a force-feeding of humble pie, it now becomes the nourishing ingredient for true peace and serenity in life. Once blind, we now begin to see the tremendous value that can come out of a life of a painfully punctured ego. We begin to fear pain less and desire humility more. Be mindful of the words of the late Arch-bishop Fulton Sheen as you practice this step, “There’s no greater tragedy in life than wasted pain.” As a result of Easing God Out (E.G.O.), we realize that, of ourselves, we are nothing and that God does all the work in our lives and has a definite plan for them.

Who are you? Have you “*found your game*” and identified your shortcomings?

The #6 Iron

Make Your Own Luck

During my competitive career, I drew a player in match play events that to say he had my number would have been an understatement. Talk about depth, this man floated irons that landed on greens like marshmallows. Then to add salt to the wound, he had such great hands that he would, for instance, hit a six iron where he could have easily hit an eight. He without doubt “found his game” and he gave up power to have control. He plain out-classed me every time.

Then there was a guy that I drew each year during my high school career. We banged it out for three years and at the end of my senior year, I found myself 0 and 3 against him. In my senior year, I shot 72 at his home course. I figured I had him this time only for him to birdie the last hole and edge me out by a shot. Truth is, he always edged me out because he prepared that little extra that I traded for horsing around.

Do we not have people like this in our every day lives? The sibling who is always the star (and maybe that’s you) and takes the spotlight from you even when you have a triumph? Or the business associate who lives to have the “one-up” on you? How about the parent that you bucked because the two of you shared identical, undesirable, characteristics so you consciously or maybe unconsciously took it out on each other? The list goes on and on, but I think you get my drift.

It’s now time to examine those relationships and free yourself. Come clean with yourself to the truth and begin “making your own luck” in life by gaining the unbeatable depth of wisdom through truth that the “Slick One” can’t handle. Our number six iron for playing the game of life is *“Made a list of all persons I have harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.”*

The moment we honestly agreed to have our defects removed in the previous step, God begins to turn us outward to prepare us to love others. We are called to love everyone. Some have argued, “We don’t have to like them but we are called to love them.” However, before we can love others in the present, we must do our part to heal the broken and bruised relationships of the past. The fact is that the guilt, shame, pain, and resentments surrounding these relationships have been stored in the basements of our lives forcing us to unconsciously isolate and keep our distance from other people and even from God. (Remember, \$5.00 Worth of God Please! Re-visit the 5 Wood “Letting Go!”)

Besides, what ever happened to repentance anyway? America’s favorite song seems to be “I’m Mr. Lonely.” I’m going to stick my neck out here. Many churches today spot that need and eagerly promise they will be friendly, loving, and even be that family that is longed for. This is certainly one area where denominational and doctrinal divisions vanish and each has its own way of making the pitch. The gospel of comfort is a gospel of minimal expectations. Christianity is the greatest religion in the world today and the greatest spiritual power in history. But, we don’t act like it. The apostle Paul more envisioned a transformation of lives having Christ live in us

and us in Him.

So, if we are going to invite Christ to live in us we need to be crucified in him. We need to take heed of the words of Isaiah and “walk through the fires.” We must stop looking for ways to microwave our lives into shape. If we were to run through the fires, that would have been the command. Instead we have the promise that if we “walk” we will not be burned.

In this step, we will find that the only way out of pain is **through** the pain...not around it. Instead of justifying ourselves, we need to repent and own our parts in the broken and bruised relationships of our lives and eventually confess and make amends where fitting.

- Begin making a list of the people you have harmed. You should have a partial list from Step 4, The 5 Wood “Letting Go!”
- As you make your list include what each of these people did to harm you and then list your part. (Men, take a close look at the relationship with your fathers, and women, your mothers. Even if they’re gone, you can still make an amends).

Don’t go out all excited and begin making amends. We’re not there yet. The main purpose of this step is to begin cleaning your slate and **preparing** (there’s that word again) yourself to make an amends regardless of the other person’s reaction.

The #7 Iron

Breaking Out of the Pack

Could you imagine a football player sprinting down the sideline and noticing a millimeter of his shoe cross the out of bounds line and calling it? How about a basketball player taking that extra step that only he picked up and calling it? Or a baseball player who traps a fly ball and then immediately admits it touched the ground first? However, it's every day practice for a golfer who is standing over a putt and only they notice the ball rock forward and backward ever so slightly that calls a penalty on themselves. Or a golfer notices they have walked off of the first tee with one extra club and they immediately alert an official and incur the due penalty. I guess that's why Bobby Jones called golf "The game for a lifetime." It's exactly the way we should live our lives. No flirting with the out of bounds lines, no trapping people to get a manipulated outcome, and no taking extra steps of liberties to bend the rules of life to suit our needs.

Our number seven iron for playing the game of life is "*Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*" The key words here are "*except when to do so would injure them or others.*" I heard a saying some years ago that has stuck to me like dried epoxy: *Honesty without compassion is nothing more than subtle hostility.*" I must say that in my five years as director of this ministry, I have run into many so-called "mature" Christians who are very willing to dump their life's anger on someone under the guise of "honesty." As it says repeatedly in the book of Deuteronomy, "Be Careful!"

Making amends is about reconciliation, which is the center of the Christian message. Keep in mind that when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son. His Son's command to us is "first" go and be reconciled with you brother. Be mindful also of the words... "my peace I leave with you." Unless we take the risk of being rejected and make amends, we cannot become reconciled with those we have harmed, and we are blocked not only from relating to those persons but also from fully worshiping God. Whether it's in life or golf we must take full responsibility for the way we play the game and our decisions. There's no blame game allowed in the winner's circle.

We make amends by simply telling the person(s) we have harmed the truth about our actions. This amends is mainly for our healing and self-acceptance and hopefully the serenity we will receive will be worth the rejection we may encounter. Doing this step correctly also takes courage, prudence, good judgment, and a careful sense of timing. Don't go run out and start making off-the-cuff amends until you have worked these steps (in their order) thoroughly with your caddie. Remember, there is no "microwaving into shape" in this game. "In the burnin' comes the learnin'!"

You will encounter four groups of people to make amends to...

- 1. People you go to at once:** usually family members or those close to you where you are in continuing personal relationships. Have patience and like a swing change, make it slowly so it becomes habit.
- 2. People to whom you make only partial disclosure:** Complete disclosure might do more

harm than good. This is especially true in matters of sexual immorality. The objective here is not to clear your self while putting someone else on the griddle. This group must be worked closely with your caddie. NEVER make an amends at someone else's expense. Remember, "Honesty without compassion is nothing more than subtle hostility."

3. **Specific family members, friends, and others:** This too is a complex group. At first, just go to them admitting the denial of your past behavior. Second, be patient! These people will probably be the ones to doubt your change. Let them see how your life is changing. Show them consistency and authenticity. Continue the amends process with a caring integrity so your relationship with God doesn't suffer. This is where you need to "find your game" because, like the pros, you're going to have to make the choice to call it on yourself.
4. **People with whom you can't make personal contact:** This group is made up of those people in your life that have either moved or died. The suggestion here is to write a letter to those individuals making your amends. Upon completion, a practice that I was taught was to burn the letter so that you put finality to the amends.

Be prepared. Some people are not going to accept your amends. **NEVER** make an amends to manipulate another's forgiveness. **Own your past sins...it will keep humility in your future!** In the game of life, you must continue to "**call it on yourself**" if you are going to keep your side of the street clean.

The #8 Iron

Ooh, That Exciting Backspin!

Growing up around a public golf course I met many real characters. One of these was an African-American man named Mickey. When Mickey got up to a shot, he waggled the club in a way that made him look like he was dancing, and he never stopped moving until he completed the shot. As a result, Mickey earned the name “*Rhythm*” by his friends. If Mickey hit an approach shot to the green and the ball backed up, he would dance around more than Chi Chi Rodriguez and he wouldn’t care what he shot; seeing that exciting spin made his day. Our number eight iron for playing the game of life is, “*Continue to take personal inventory and when you are wrong, promptly admit it.*”

A golf club swung properly makes a perfect circle and in order to get that exciting backspin, the pro’s work many long hours on precisely finding the bottom of their swings which allows them to get that spin because they are striking the ball so purely. Trust me, in Mickey’s case, it was a complete accident when he spun the ball and he knew it.

Have you found that exact bottom in your life? Have you reached that place in your life where you’ve come ***completely*** to the end of yourself? Are you living life purely or are you still flirting with the out-of-bounds lines at times? Well, you’re about to enter *G.O.L.F.*’s “NO SPIN ZONE.”

There’s a term used in politics today called “spin.” To understand what the word means, just take a look at some of the rationalizations made by politicians today and you will understand the meaning of “spin.” However, the deception behind “spin” is that we can get ahead by mastering its technique, but in truth it really makes our lives go backwards. As we perfect this crafty “spin” in our lives, we move closer to a back slide in life as it grips us tighter and tighter. We can get to a point where we don’t know if we’re telling the truth or not. We begin to believe our lies, and we move to an intoxicated state of relevance. The more we allow ourselves the liberty of moving away from a life of rigorous honesty, the more we will move towards our old way of living.

Just like the pros analyze every round, we must spend time at the end of each day analyzing the day. Journaling is a great way to monitor how we use our time, finances, the balance in our life, and our relationships, etc. The “greats” of the game practiced until their hands bled. It’s no different if we want to truly win at life. This type of living minimizes life’s so-called “slips.” The Bible tells us that we are to live with “sober minds” meaning, “sound minds.” What the word “slip” really means is “Sound thinking Lost It’s Priority.” The best way to keep our lives and our golf games sound is as the great golf instructor Bob Toski repeats over and over again...***PRACTICE!***

The #9 Iron

Who Is This “Man” Jesus?

The game’s notable players all shared the same technique when it came to hitting the more lofted irons. They approached these clubs from an open position and narrowed their swings. This is the part of the game where accuracy replaces distance. Once we begin working down from the number eight iron to the wedges, distance is no longer our quest. Our number nine iron for playing the game of life is, *“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, as I understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for me, and the power to carry it out.”* Here at G.O.L.F., we have clearly come to the belief...an “understanding” that Jesus the Christ is the Son of God. For some, this is still a fact they use to shy away, and that seems to be the case for men especially. So God’s timing being what it is, there’s no better time to take a close look at who this man Jesus is then during Holy Week.

One of the greatest rewards of prayer and meditation is the sense of belonging. As you proceed through this tip, keep in mind the following questions...

- Who was the most dominant person in your life as a child?
- What is your opinion of that person?
- Were they understanding and loving? Or were they punishing and maybe even cruel at times?

While not an exact science, chances are, your feelings towards that dominant person are the same feelings you share towards God and the acceptance of His Son. Take heart, I’m not going to lecture you but let you know there is positive evidence for you to feel the way you do. But there is also very credible evidence in favor of accepting Jesus for you to consider. However, you will need to open yourself up and narrow your view. One thing Jesus asked is that we come to him like little children. Let’s keep it basic and simple!

The ideology of masculinity has replaced Christianity as the true religion of most men. Frankly speaking, “Christianity is something that is for women and for non-masculine men,” writes Dr. Leon J. Poddles in his book, “The Church Impotent...The Feminization of Christianity.” And in light of the recent events in the Catholic Church, those who share this theory, I would think, have done some construction on the walls they have already built making them higher and thicker. In order for anyone to execute the lofted clubs in winning fashion, if you haven’t made an amends to that dominant person in your life (living or deceased), now’s the time to “open up.” Scary as it may seem, a tip I was given some years back was, “When your knees knock...kneel on them.”

Let’s examine some of the facts...

The birth of Jesus was important enough in history that it split things into two parts, BC “Before Christ” and AD “After Christ.” As Philip Yancey puts it, “Everything that has ever happened on this planet falls into a category of before or after Christ.”

Let’s think about the golf course. In all my years of playing, I am still waiting for a golfer to yell

“Buddha Damn” after missing a shot. There’s an old joke about a Chinese businessman returning to China to report about his observation of Americans. After completing his report he said, “Very interesting! On recent trip to U.S., I also observed honorable Americans hitting little white ball playing game called...Jesus Christ - Must be new kind of western church.” While intended to be humorous, why weren’t they playing “Mohamed” or “Allah”.

Has any one of the other graves been guarded out of fear the dead person would get out except for Jesus? We live in an area of “strategic thinkers.” I know this to be true because many of the men I talk to seem to be going into a strategic planning meeting right when I call. I sometimes wondered if my timing is that good, or if it is becoming another one of our new buzz words. Let’s think this out then. We have been hearing about the Taliban and their treatment of women and the position that women were put in for months. This is the same position they were in during the time of Christ. For those who doubt the Bible as the Word of God, who back then would have strategically thought through things, knew there would be a sexual revolution in this country in the 1960’s and have Jesus appear to a woman? That’s one I still can’t get around since it just wasn’t a part of the thinking process of the day.

Try studying the medical explanation of a crucifixion. Understand the torture and the reality of what really takes place and tell me you have to be a so-called “real man” to take it.

Having been raised in a strict Catholic family and having one foot in the door of seminary with the Maryknoll Fathers, I can tell you that while I did not have to be sold on Jesus Christ, I was braced to lay the head of a driver on the first “Jesus freak fanatic” that came near me on the first evangelical retreat I went on. Then, I saw the type of men on the retreat. Several of the leaders of the retreat were IBM executives. Instead, the Holy Spirit hit me upside the head with the driver I brought and gave me a realization that I still today can’t find a loophole in, and I’m sure many of you have shared similar experiences.

When I was in the golf business and I worked at clubs, I ran into many influential people, doctors and executives whose offices knew my name and would take my call whenever I called them. However, once I left that particular club, they forgot who I was. It was the game of golf that held us together. However, I then got to be friends with these IBM executives and the realization that came to me was that I had absolutely nothing to offer these men. However, their offices knew my name and took my call also. This time I realized, the ingredient holding us together was the “person” of Jesus Christ. It became clear to me that these men were certainly capable of thinking through the “Jesus stuff” and if there was a loophole, they would have found it. Since then, there have been countless men who I have befriended and it’s our brother Jesus right in the middle of it all.

Truth is, at one time I was afraid to feel my feelings. Aren’t we as men told as we grow up that vulnerability is a sign of weakness? Honestly, about nine years ago, I made a face-to-face amends to my father. He darn near came off the chair at me. I’m only in this ministry today as a result of working through some past pain that I had really no choice but to work through. The other “escapes” were just not worth the odds. A little over a year ago my brother died suddenly at the prosperous age of forty-four. When my parents and I approached the casket for the first time, little did I know that when I braced my father because he was shaking so hard that the floor

under me felt like I was experiencing a tremor, my brother Jesus would make it clear to me that it was my turn to take care of my father.

This step is about our relationship with our Heavenly Father, and our understanding at G.O.L.F. is there is no other Way to the Father except through His Son. Think about it this way, if a strange child came into your home you would probably at the very least show them the door. But what about if it was a friend of your son or daughter that was like family (our family has some of them), you wouldn't think twice if they walked into your home. It's not uncommon that they be there with you when your children are not home. Well, it's the same with our Heavenly Father. Our heart is Christ's home and Jesus and the Father are one.

Through regular use of prayer and meditation, we would no more do without it than we would refuse air, food, or sunshine. When we refuse air, light, or food, the body suffers, and when we turn away from prayer and meditation after doing it for a while, we deprive our minds and our hearts of the vitally needed endurance for life it gives us. We should simply ask God each day to place in us the best understanding of His will for that day and that by His grace, we may carry it through. Remember, when it comes to our needs, He knows them before we even ask. We should start up each day on the practice tee with Our Lord before we leave and hit that first tee of the day so that we are loose and ready to go. Like the pros, it's just a warm up we're looking for. Keep it simple!

If it wasn't for the example and Christ-centered friendships of the men I have come to know, I would have never found the guts to make that amends to my father nine years ago. While I don't come with diplomas from major universities, and my vocabulary is somewhat limited, I can assure you that the one thing I have learned since being in ministry is that pain doesn't discriminate and it levels the playing field between the rich and the poor, and the educated and the non-educated. So, open your stance a bit, narrow your views and become like children, make those amends, find that accountability, and you will find that there is a "real man" and his name is Jesus Christ that wants to take up residence in your heart. Then, you will begin living a life of pinpoint accuracy and have a peace that passes all understanding.

Let me give you the names of some of the touring professionals, other sports figures, and members of the media who I know have come to this realization and openly profess their faith: Byron Nelson, Doug Sanders, Tom Lehman, Bernhard Langer, Paul Stankowski, Steve Jones, Larry Nelson, Casey Martin, Larry Mize, Scott Simpson, Mark McCumber, Steward Cink, David Bloom, Jim Nance, Bobby Valentine, Howard Cross, Andy Pettit, Bobby Richardson, to name just a few, and how could we forget the late greats Ben Hogan and Payne Stewart and at the end of his life, even Mickey Mantle came to this realization.

The Pitching Wedge

“Hey! Where’s the Beef?”

The pitching wedge was actually one of the first utility clubs. However, unlike the utility woods that have been introduced to the game recently that can actually be a quick fix for avoiding the long irons, the pitching wedge is a utility club requiring razor like precision to execute properly and to it’s full potential. Sam Snead is probably known as the greatest golfer to ever master the pitching wedge. Unlike many of today’s professionals who use a sand wedge from the fairway more regularly, Snead was able to hit just as many different type pitch shots using his pitching wedge. This, however, didn’t just happen without countless hours of practice on Snead’s part. Snead felt that he was able to have more consistency and control without having the sand wedge’s bounce interfere with the shot. This is a perfect strategy to follow if you are an occasional/weekend golfer.

I must admit, especially in my young career, I was impressed with gaining distance and power. As a result, I had my “ears trimmed” many times by what was known as a “scraper” who, tee to green, was unimpressive but knew how to get the ball “up-and-down.” During this time there was a popular TV commercial running and one man used its famous line against me when he said, “Hey long and wrong, it’s not how you drive but how you arrive...Where’s the beef?” He said, “When you look at the scorecard, no one can tell how long you hit it, they just see the score and a par’s a par pretty or ugly.” I gained much wisdom from some of the old timers that crossed my path and today I’m extremely thankful that I was blessed to meet them.

Our Pitching Wedge for playing the game of life is, *“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, I try to carry this message to others and practice these principals in all my affairs.”* As long as we have put the face of Jesus Christ on our higher power, let me be frank. Christ was never flashy when reaching out to anyone. In fact, after many of his miracles he was quoted as saying, “Tell no one what you saw.” I was reading a story about Mother Teresa where she was asked by the host of a radio show, “What could we do to help you?” Bracing himself for the “ask” of money, Mother Teresa responded by saying, “The most help you could give me today is to find someone who is un-lovable and show them the love of Jesus.” Needless to say, that little old lady with no corporate savvy whatsoever left that host speechless.

The twelfth step, like the Pitching Wedge is based on dedication to practice. The practice we are talking about here is the application of the previous eleven steps in our every day lives resulting in a spiritual awakening grounded in humility. Simply stated, we go out and love because God first loved us. That’s it! We reach out to others unconditionally, expecting nothing in return, and **PLEASE**, this is not about networking.

Try Mother Teresa’s request to the radio host and reach out to someone unlovable who can offer you nothing. Be careful here not to stand in judgment of anyone. When the Bible talks of the poor, it may just be referring to people with substantial monetary wealth that live their lives in terminal greed and misery. Remember the Christmas classic “A Christmas Carol”? Marley’s ghost appears to Ebenezer Scrooge and uses some of his own words against him. “Are there no

prisons? The work houses, have they ceased operations? Well if the poor are going to die, they better do so and decrease the surplus population.” Marley warns Scrooge that “the misery those poor people have suffered is but a drop in the sea of life of your misery and greed.” We love because God first loved us...period!

The secret of abundant living is the art of simply giving. The paradox here is the more you give, the more you have. That’s what makes God’s grace so amazing. If we lose our life in the service of others, we will actually save it. We were given an abundance to give it to others so that we will live more abundantly. But for the grace of God go I! Please make this more than a figure of speech in your life by having the courage to feel it and share it.

Question: If you were to meet your Maker face-to-face today, would He be impressed with your life’s scorecard? Are you the flashy long-ball hitter, or the scraper who gets it up-and-down that really no one notices...But Him?

The Sand Wedge

“Up, Up, and Away!”

Eugenio Saraceni, better known to the golfing world during the first half of the twentieth century as Gene Sarazen and nicknamed “The Squire”, was one of the few players to ever win the coveted “Grand Slam”. Sarazen is probably best known for his 235 yard four wood second shot on the par five 15th hole during the 1935 Masters which resulted in a double eagle two, a shot that his caddie, nicknamed “Stovepipe”, tried to convince Sarazen not to attempt. Sarazen went on to win that Masters in a playoff. I guess at times it pays to be a “thick-headed Italian.”

What’s probably least well known about Sarazen is the debt of gratitude golfers worldwide owe him for a little invention called the sand wedge. The story has it he was watching planes taking off one day and noticed how they bounced a bit before takeoff due to their rounded tail. This gave Sarazen an idea. He soldered extra metal to the sole of an old niblick (8 or 9 Iron), which made it heavier, broader, and added bounce to the club, and the sand wedge, as we know it today, was born.

Imagine the difficulty trying to get out of a sand trap today using an eight or nine iron with the soft “silica” sand found in most bunkers? It would be next to impossible due to its texture. Thanks to Sarazen, a newfound freedom was given to golfers in the way they approached a bunker shot. Much of the fear of a niblick digging into the sand and the ball shooting out uncontrollably was gone.

Our sand wedge for playing the game of life is, *“I am going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. I will comprehend the word serenity. I will realize that no matter how far down the scale I have gone I will see how my experience can benefit others.”* We’ve completed the twelve steps for managing life and now we’re completing our bag with two of the twelve “promises” of the twelve-step program.

The way to approach a sand shot is to dig your feet into the sand to determine its texture and to assure firm footing. The golfer’s stance should be open and the bottom of the club, known as the “flange”, should also be open and lined up with the intended target.

The same holds true with life. If we are going to know a new freedom and happiness in our lives, and truly comprehend the word “serenity” no matter what life deals us, we are going to have to open ourselves up to the Word of God, the teachings of the Holy Spirit, and that person we are accountable to in life...our caddie.

If you’ve been working through these clubs over the past weeks, hopefully you too have learned some tips on how to “bounce” back when life deals you a bad hand. Or maybe you’re managing your everyday affairs better and no longer “digging in” and white-knuckling your way through life.

Here’s a positive affirmation...”Open the eyes of my heart Lord. Search me and lead me to the

pathway of your truth.”

Let’s end with a little more trivia. **Did you know who in 1923 was . . .**

1. President of the largest steel company?
2. President of the largest gas company?
3. President of the New York Stock Exchange?
4. President of the Bank of International Settlement?
5. The greatest wheat speculator?
6. The Great Bear of Wall Street?

These men should have been considered some of the world’s most successful men. At least they found the secret of making money. Now more than 55 years later, do you know what has become of these men?

1. The President of the largest steel company died a pauper.
2. The President of the largest gas company is insane.
3. The President of the NYSE was released from prison to die at home.
4. The President of the Bank of International Settlement shot himself.
5. The greatest wheat speculator died abroad penniless.
6. The Great Bear of Wall Street committed suicide.

That same year, 1923, the winner of two of the most prestigious golf tournaments was Gene Sarazen. He won both the US Open and PGA Championships. He died on May 13, 1999 of old age at the age of 97...

The Putter

“Keep It Simple!”

I believe the story comes from Jack Nicklaus’ book “Golf My Way”, where Jack tells the story of playing a sociable round of golf with his wife Barbara. At the time, Jack was having some putting woes and being the technical perfectionist he is, Jack was trying all sorts of intricate adjustments. Meanwhile Barbara, an occasional golfer at best, was snaking in putts from different time zones with the same effortless approach that Chevy Chase used in the movie Caddy Shack, and her basics approaching the putts were poor at best. Finally awe-struck, Jack asked Barbara how in the world she could make so many putts when she’s approaching them all wrong. Barbara replied something to the effect, “It’s simple; you just aim the blade and hit the ball.”

Our putter for playing the game of life is *“My whole attitude and outlook on life will change when I come to the realization that God is doing for me what I could not do for myself.”* The first ingredient of good putting is to believe you’re a good putter and second is to believe in your method. All the practice on the basics and the intricacies of the stroke will be nil if, when standing over a three-foot pressure packed curler, you have any doubt you can make it.

Let’s review the fundamentals of putting: 1) eyes lined up over the ball; 2) focus on the line and aim the blade on that line; 3) the putter blade swings back and through on your intended line; 4) believe in your method, and 5) maintain perspective remembering that if you miss a putt, all the things in life that matter most will still be there. Now let’s review how we should be using our putter for life: 1) turn your eyes upon God, 2) keep the focus on yourself remembering you cannot change other people, places or things, 3) play life straight down the middle, flirting with life’s out-of-bounds lines is not permitted here 4) believe in your method, and 5) maintain perspective remembering that if you miss that next deal, or something you really want falls through, all the things in life that matter most will still be there.

On the greens of any golf course, golf is a game of inches. One day you make everything and the next day your hands turn to stone. It’s no different in life, right? One day you get all the breaks, and the next day life throws you a curve. So, if you believe in your new found method of letting go of your life and letting God run it, your whole outlook on life will change when you clearly see how God is now doing for you what you could not do for yourself...***that’s a promise!***

Where Have All The Caddies Gone?

Many golf courses today have eliminated caddies for the sake of the bottom line. After all, they can get more golfers on the golf course each day if they ride carts. I hear more and more people talk about how fast they play rather than how well. Rush, Rush, Rush, no matter if it's in life or golf today, everyone seems to be in a big hurry.

Have you ever heard people say how difficult it is for them to stay focused on God? They say this is due to the competitiveness of the marketplace, the area we live in, and also the time demands being put on us these days. I must admit there are many days when I feel like one of those people.

When I was playing competitive golf, I had a caddie named Kenny. While just a young man, he came to know me inside and out. He became a second pair of eyes, a second mind, and a wonderful balance to my game. He knew when to crack the jokes and when to pass a firm comment if my attitude needed adjusting.

In both life and golf, we must live lives based on sound principles because when the winds of challenge come, we are all gripped at times with the feelings of pressure, fear, anger, and failure. "But I have God in my life. That's all I need," you might say. However, God, in His infinite wisdom, knew we couldn't play the game of life alone right from the start, so he sent his disciples out in twos. From when we are young, we are told to be *independent*. If you're like me, you've grown up playing life like Superman.

Many of us today set out to mingle with other people we deem to be "like us" or are of benefit to us. Some of the greatest and most valuable caddies in the professional ranks...didn't even play golf. They did, however, possess a tremendous ability to support "their man," a phrase used by the caddies on the P.G.A. Tour. They read greens with laser accuracy and they were able to pace the distance of a golf course to fit their pro's game. Finally, if you ask many of the top pros what is the single most important feature of their caddie, they will tell you, "they help me stay focused."

Let me ask you: Who is your caddie in life? And equally as important, Who do you caddie for? (*This person should not be your spouse and **must** be of the same sex.*) Another valuable job a caddie has is to keep their man out of their own heads. I have found that when I'm playing the day in my own head, I step back and look for someone to caddie for by just picking up the phone or sending an e-mail. As a result, I'm the one who usually gets blessed and I can get the focus back on playing the remainder of the day.

Choosing a Caddie for Playing the Game of Life

I have referred numerous times to the caddie in your life. How seriously have you taken that? I'm going to spend the first of the last six weeks of the year reviewing the importance of an accountability relationship. First, we will look at the need of an accountability relationship. Second, we will look at the dilemma of why most of us don't have such a relationship. Third, we will cover how to choose an accountability partner. Weeks two through six we will cover the five "C's" which are the five ingredients of a healthy and prosperous accountability relationship. They are: *Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion, and Continuance*. Included with the last week's tip will be an accountability fellowship Bible study.

I will guarantee you that Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino, Sam Snead, Arnold Palmer or any of the greats in the game who played in intense competition day-in and day-out would not have been nearly as successful and could never have held up under the pressure alone. Yet, how many of us play the game of life in this competitive environment day-in and day-out by grinding our teeth and letting things churn in our guts? The only things we really accomplish are that our relationships suffer more, or we choose to work harder numbing our feelings even more, or we just do it the old fashioned way and drink excessively or use hard drugs socially.

But on the other hand, how could many of us in this stage of life be expected to change our ways now? After all, our current habits are what got us to where we are now, good or bad. Many of us who are products of the 60's adopted the lifestyle of chronic independence from God as well as other people. We subscribe to the theory that "if it is meant to be...it is up to me."

We're told from our young teens and maybe even earlier to stand on our own two feet and become independent, aren't we? But let me ask you. Wouldn't you be able to go through life more focused on winning the game and more peaceful if you had someone helping you carry your life's baggage that clubs you over the head right at the times when you need it least? It's proven that a person is more successful at dieting, exercising, giving up smoking or other substances, if they are accountable to someone else. While there are exceptions to the rule, it's a hard one to argue. The Recovery Movement which began in this country in the mid 1930's and has gone on to be the most successful program in the world at bringing people back to life and helping them win the game is only successful with at least one other person.

If you know anything about selecting a caddie, a golfer will select a caddie the same way a relationship begins in every day life. How many of us married the first person we had a crush on or still have that first best friend we had as a child? Environments changed and we met new friends as time went by. As we matured, we had to get out of our comfort zones before we met new people.

The same strategy holds true in beginning an accountability relationship. It begins by getting out of your comfort zone. Go to that men's or women's group in your church, go on a retreat weekend, or get out into the Christian community and meet new friends. Observe the fruits in the people's lives you meet and see if you get wisdom from them that maybe you didn't have before.

Or maybe they're just the opposite, and it will be great to get another point of view when sorting through things as you play the game.

Most people who are truly winning at the game of life and are enjoying a serene lifestyle, owe that serenity to the fact that someone took a special interest in them and was willing to share the gift of themselves with them. Accountability with another should be welcomed and accepted as an opportunity to bridge personal experiences and deepen the satisfaction that comes from working with others. There is no better way to experience God's amazing grace than through helping others...unconditionally.

“Confidence” in Choosing a Caddie

I remember back to my caddying days when the first few times I caddied for a new person, about the only thing I got to do was carry their clubs. They rarely asked for yardage and they never asked my opinion on reading a putt. Even though I was a tremendous caddie (ha ha!), I had not earned their confidence.

In any relationship, confidence is critical to its success. Probably the best way to build confidence in any accountability relationship is to share with the other person our experience, strength and hope in life. This is not a counseling relationship. Be genuine! We are all sinners saved by grace and it's easier to build confidence with someone by letting them know they're not alone. And forget that you're “mature” in your walk (if you are), and remember that we're all a day away from a back-slide. Satan is far craftier than any “one” of us. This is without a doubt the primary reason for this relationship. This relationship is not about maturity...but honesty.

Ask yourself the question...

Do I really care enough about other people to get their confidence and help them win the game of life?

“Confession” in the Player Caddie Relationship

I must admit that I’m enjoying this opportunity to revisit my caddie days. I’m now recalling caddie/player relationships I began with many new golfers. It wasn’t until they had the chance to size me up and I had seen everything about their games over numerous rounds that I gained their confidence and they would begin asking my opinion on the course. They took their time in sizing me up to see what made me tick and if I was compatible with them.

As an accountability relationship proceeds by us honestly sharing our experiences, new found strength, and hope in life, we will begin to get our new friend to begin sharing a bit about themselves as they become more comfortable with us because they’ve had the opportunity to size us up. Whether it’s in life or golf, patience is the key. Our new friend may begin by only trusting us with bits here and there. We need to hang in there “a-day-at-a-time”, patiently allowing them the time they need to develop confidence in the relationship.

The confession step is not about deep seeded sins, but about opening up with someone and allowing that baggage which we all accumulate over time to stop clubbing us with guilt, shame, fear, worry, success, failure, etc. and to begin lightening the load by sharing it with our caddie in life, which will begin the process of becoming free and the person God created us to be for His glory. For us men especially, this is a frightening step but, if medical statistics are correct, it could be a life-saving step with our longevity. A recent study I read suggested that having a best friend could be a major reason why women continue to outlive men.

Over the next three weeks, I’m going to share with you some real dialogue between a caddie and “their man” which will demonstrate confidence and trust in their relationship.

Golfer: "I've played so poorly all day; I think I'm going to go drown myself in that lake."

Caddie: "Sir, I don't think you could keep your head down that long."

Golfer: "You've got to be the worst caddie in the world!"

Caddie: "I doubt it, Sir that would be too much of a coincidence"

Golfer: "I'd move heaven and earth to be able to break 100 on this course."

Caddie: "Try heaven, Sir. You've already moved most of the earth."

Ask yourself the question...

Do I really care enough about other people to get their confidence so they will open up to me, and through the Power of God can I can be an instrument in helping them win the game of life?

“CONVICTION” in the ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIP

The third ingredient of an accountability relationship is conviction. As the confidence levels continue to build and we begin to open up with each other more, we must get honest and begin coming to the end of ourselves in order to experience true growth and have our lives bear fruit.

We must get out of the driver's seat of our life and accept our limitations and admit we are powerless to produce the outcomes in our lives.

This especially holds true for young tour players fresh out of college. When they hit the tour, it's a new ball game. It's a good idea that a new tour player's first caddie is older. Knowing and accepting their limitations can be the difference between keeping their card and going back to Q-School. As young kids we go after the power. As John Daly says, "we let the big dog eat" almost always. We don't play out from trees; we try to go through them. We're indestructible...so we think. However, one round with a top player and it doesn't take long for us to become humbled.

Isn't this the same way in life? Many of us have had to have our ears trimmed in order to gain the wisdom we enjoy today. Healthy accountable relationships will help us to see and face who we really are and just how unsuccessful we will be at playing life alone.

If we're honest about ourselves and the other person, there's no limit to what we can become, and the instrument we can be in helping another achieve their eternal potential. We must remember that Satan is an equal opportunity employer and doesn't discriminate between any denomination or religion. So, if a situation seems to be beyond our power, we have the assurance of the Word of God that He will equip the called.

A good piece of advice with this phase of the relationship is to keep in mind that honesty without compassion is no more than subtle hostility. Let's return to our friends from last week and eavesdrop on more of the dialogue between them. I think we will see they didn't take this advice.

“Continuance” - The “Ace” In the Hole

Over the Christmas holiday, it seems that whenever I turned on a news broadcast, one of the questions asked of people interviewed was, “Does Christmas feel different this year as a result of 9/11?” The answer was a resounding “Yes” across the board. Let’s explore why this is and we will then understand why the “continuance” ingredient is so critical to the accountability relationship.

I am as guilty as anyone of contributing staleness to a relationship by taking another person for granted, assuming they will always be there for me. However, I have shown myself time and time again that when I stay out of my own head and reach out to others, I seem to be able to play every day as if it were my U.S. Open in life.

Whether it’s on the course or in life, let’s join with that person we are accountable to and keep each other mindful of the following...

“Every strong and beautiful flower must have a strong root in the ground. It must send a root down so that it may be rooted and grounded while at the same time it sends a shoot up to be a flower that shall gladden the world. Both growths are necessary. Without a strong root, it would wither. The higher the growth upward, the deeper must be the rooting.”¹

Our lives cannot flower into success and helpfulness unless they are rooted in a strong faith, (for our purposes at G.O.L.F., that is a faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God), and we feel deeply secure in the goodness and purpose of God’s loving and amazing grace.

The goal for future Christmas seasons should be a different feeling from past seasons not because of some disaster, but because we have entered into an accountability relationship where we abide in Christ daily, thus making our hearts a Bethlehem for the Son of God and experiencing that promised peace that passes all understanding with a feeling of Christmas every day of the year through good times and bad. Through a solid accountability relationship as we grow in our purpose for God, hopefully our future Christmas days will not need a commercial hype (and snow) to prepare our hearts for a feeling of “peace on earth and goodwill to men.”

Ask yourself the question...

Do I really care enough about others to get out of my own head and be willing to be that strong root in another budding flower?

Golfer: "Do you think I can get there with a 5-iron?"

Caddie: "Eventually."

Golfer: "This is the worst golf course I've ever played on!"

Caddie: "This isn't the golf course, sir! We left that an hour ago!"

Golfer: "Well, I have never played this badly before!"

Caddie: "I didn't realize you had played before, sir."

Ask yourself the question...

Have I become honest enough with myself and have I accepted my limitations in order to help others become honest through my experiences, strength, and hope in life?

Reading Greens

One of the most common complaints when playing a strange golf course is being unfamiliar with reading the greens. We make up excuse after excuse for the three putts.

The problem is most golfers don't know how to read greens. We read greens like we live life in that we acknowledge a situation in front of us and expect to meet it head on when the time comes without taking a step back and thinking before we act. This holds true in the last minute society we live in today.

Most golfers don't realize that you begin reading a green the moment you see it, even from 200 yards away. The slope is much more pronounced from a longer distance. However for many of us, we would rather be joking (or complaining) with the rest of the foursome and then we get annoyed when we "three putt". Short game guru Dave Peltz says "Putting represents 43% of the game." Yet you'll usually see far more people on the driving range than the putting green going after the power...just like many of us do in life.

You should always walk onto the green from its lowest spot, just like we should approach each day from a low spot...*humility*. When looking over a putt, you need to do your investigating. Looking at the lay of the land is only half the battle. Just recently at our annual outing (which was a scramble event), I watched four players miss a 10-foot putt (from exactly the same spot) that clearly broke from right to left (so they thought.) Each player missed it to the right side of the hole and could not believe it never broke.

However, sitting in a cart from a longer distance, I was able to see that the cup was cut at a right angle. Take a right-to-left putt and a cup set at a right angle, and you have a straight putt every time.

Many of us have situations we are misreading in our lives today because we are not seeing all of the warning signs, or *we are choosing not to see them*. We're living life as humans "doing" rather than humans "being". The solution, on the greens of life and the golf course, is the keen wisdom of your caddie...*hands down*.

Here's some inside tips on reading greens...

- They *all* break because they must be able to drain.
- Usually greens drain from back to front.
- Usually the grain will run with the drainage.
- Putting is based on what we see & perceive, and like life, we usually misjudge it.

Tip: double every break you read, especially if it breaks away from you. If you're a right-handed golfer, how many times do you miss a left-to-right putt on the high side of the hole? If you're one of those who play from the wrong side of the ball, just reverse it. Take it from Yogi, "*ninety-percent of all the putts missed on the low side of the hole never go in.*"

Many of us have situations we are misreading in our lives today because we are either misreading or not seeing all of the warning signs. Unfortunately, there are some of us who are choosing not to see them at all. The solution, on the greens of life and the golf course, is the keen wisdom of your caddie...*hands down. Two sets of eyes are better than one.*

There are many stories about Tommy Bolt, one of the legends in the game known for his *aggressive* temper, which included an occasional club toss. Rumor has it that he missed a crucial putt and when the hole was over, he went back, putted it three more times, missed, and then yelled at his caddie. His caddie (not even loosened up) put the ball down, took one look at the hole, knocked it dead in the center, and then quit on Tommy on the spot for embarrassing him.

I guess you could say that caddie...BOLTED! Forgive me for that one. I just couldn't resist.

Gauging Distance

The key to consistent putting is a repeated stroke. For the non-golfer that means no matter if the putt is flat, uphill, or downhill, you stroke it the same way. Most golfers have trouble gauging distance because they think if you are putting downhill you stroke the putt easier and vice-versa for uphill. However, most of the tour players gauge distance in two ways.

From inside of ten feet it is all done by feel since this is the make-able zone. From outside of ten feet, the putter blade is swung back one inch for each foot of the putt. That's the tour player's secret of how they can get so close from just about anywhere. Now of course the greens roll differently on most every golf course so adjustments have to be made. The following is what to do:

Before each round, go to the putting green and pace off fifteen feet of flat straight green. Then swing the putter blade back fifteen inches and stroke six putts. Pick the three you stroked most consistently and pace them off to determine the distance they went. Then you are left with two choices: 1) adjust the length of the backstroke to produce the distance or 2) learn to use different parts of the putter blade to produce different rolls. The second is certainly the most popular since it involves no calculations.

This is a great method for making decisions in everyday life. Those decisions that we have to make quickly usually require feel just like inside ten feet. ***Trust your gut***, as they say. Then there are the decisions that many times just need to be given time until we have to act on them. So, all we need to do is get close to the decision. These decisions require patience and discipline just like the long putts.

Caution: On the downhill slick ones, whether you're playing life or golf all you can do is pray!

Remember, two sets of eyes are better than one on the greens so...

Get Accountable!

The Stroke

There's a saying in golf that a good stroke covers up a lot of sins. Getting that little white ball in the hole is what it's all about. As they say, "*It's not how—it's how many!*" I've played with many a so-called scraper who knew the art of how to get the ball into the hole. With all that said, the key to unlocking a perfect stroke is to trust you have one to begin with. The golfers I've played with over the years who are good putters have a trust in their putting abilities, and while they don't look pretty at all, they get the job done.

Jack Nicklaus tells the story of a round of golf he played with his wife. Jack was having some putting woes and thought he would use this round to do some experimenting. Being the methodical player he is, he approached his putts with great intensity while his wife Barbara was getting over putts with her eyes inside the line, the toe of the putter was off the ground, and totally oblivious to everything the basics say not to do, she proceeded to knock everything in the hole. With his keen eye, Jack noticed that the one thing Barbara did each time unconsciously was she hit the ball just slightly in front of the exact bottom of the stroke with a square blade.

While the putting stroke is an art and not a science, there have been some discoveries from the early days that could help you *Find Your Game!* Let's look at the various strokes...

The Wrist Stroke: used by most of the early players like Bobby Jones. This stroke was very effective in those days since the greens were not manicured in the way they are today. The wrist stroke allows the golfer to pop and somewhat slide the ball to help compensate for the bumpy terrain.

The Arm & Wrist Stroke: used by most of the players in the later part of the twentieth century like Jack Nicklaus. This stroke gave the ball a better roll since the quality of the greens began to improve.

The Arm & Shoulder Stroke: used by most of the tour players today since most greens today are very quick and require soft, level strokes.

Today, these strokes come in many variations from belly to long putters and all differing putter blade designs. Grips today vary also and the one that works for you is the right one. However, the cross-handed grip will keep the shoulders level throughout the stroke adding consistency to the way you roll the ball. This could be a huge help for the weekend or occasional golfer.

Curing the Yips

They are more feared than *the shanks*, more debilitating than *the duck-hook*. I'm referring to *The Yips*! What are they? Tour professional Bernhard Langer said, "They make you feel like your hands are not even part of your body." You can't make a putt from a foot, because the ball begins to look larger than the hole. You get to the point where the putter feels as if it has no weight to it at all. Then, a paralyzing fear sets in every time you get over a putt. What do you do to cure them? Golfers have done everything from giving up the game to getting down on their knees admitting complete defeat *and meaning it because they're desperate*, as Langer did. Langer asked, "God, if you want me to do something else, show me and I'll do it, because this is not fun."

A golfer will eventually get rid of *the yips*, but not without a change of some sort taking place; whether it's a new putting style, as was the case with Langer, or a new psychological approach to the game.

How many people today are walking around with *The Yips* in life? They're living life detached from God believing that it's *their hands* that are accomplishing their successes. Their families are suffering but they can't see or feel it. They begin like the golfer to band-aid their misses in life with material things and more gain until their problems are bigger than the hole they're in. Then, a paralyzing fear begins to set in and they begin to wish tomorrow never comes. You hear more and more of this these days, even in this land of plenty we live in. So, what's the cure?

Like the golfer, we will not get rid of *the yips* in life without some kind of a change taking place. When a golfer hits their knees with the yips, they are admitting *complete* defeat *because they're so desperate* and that's exactly what we have to do *and we need to mean it*, also.

We need to adopt a new living style that offers a solid *yip-proof* approach to the game of life. We need to nail our misses in life right to the foot of the cross of Calvary where the Slick-One who handed us our first *and biggest yip* in the garden was defeated.

Oh and before I forget, a good caddie will keep a golfer's mind off of their weak spots. Is your caddie in life keeping your mind off of your weak spots? Do you have a caddie yet? Are you also helping at least one other person carry their life's baggage?

The cure for the *Yips* in both life and golf comes from getting out of our heads. Are you out of your head today? *Are you desperate enough?* What will it take?

Just Do It!

Maintaining Perspective

Recently, while watching a program on the golf channel, I heard one of the leading sports psychologists discuss the seven-point approach he uses to coach some of the most successful professionals on the P.G.A. Tour today. One of these points he calls “***Maintaining Perspective.***”

The sudden death of Payne Stewart has really helped put golf in perspective in many of the players’ lives. All you really hear among the players since the disaster is, “*Golf is just a small part in my life. What really matters is everything else around me.*”

Let’s think together. We work hard all our lives for the pressure, don’t we? Whether it’s standing over a four foot curler on the eighteenth green with forty thousand fans breathing on you, and you can hear a pin drop *on the grass*, and the loudest thing you hear *is your heart pounding* (oh yes, let’s not forget the millions watching on TV); or whether it’s that big deal you’ve waited all your working life for. In either case if you miss, what matters most will still be there.

Great! Tell us something we don’t already know. Then allow me to ask you, how do you feel today? How’s your inner life? What is it going to take in your life to help you find a perspective to maintain?

One of my wake up calls came in the mid nineteen eighties when I qualified for the Million Dollar Round Table, which is one of the more prestigious awards in the life insurance industry. Once qualified, I received a large box of supplies that only M.D.R.T. members had. One of the items was a home study course entitled *Life Stretcher*.

The first exercise was to listen to an audiocassette, which informed me that the life expectancy for most adults at the turn of the twentieth century was approximately fifty-nine, and the leading cause of death was infectious disease. What is most scary is that the leading causes of death today in this land of opportunity are dis/eases we are causing, and the leaders are heart disease and cancer.

The second exercise was to evaluate my lifestyle by a test, which was included. After the first question I knew I wasn’t going to do very well. The test revealed to me that, based on my current success pattern, I would live to age 57 and, being 32 at the time, that didn’t seem like such a great deal. My perspective on life still didn’t begin to change immediately; it took a missed four-foot curler (*or maybe I made it?*) six years later. I’ll keep you posted on my life’s perspective on my 58th birthday.

The sports psychologist mentioned above says he teaches the pros he’s training the following affirmation to be used when facing the pressures of life and golf, “***My God loves me, my family loves me, so where does this four footer really fit in?***”

Staying in the Present

In recent years, the game of golf has finally become a sport. What do I mean by that? The past greats of the game were very talented individuals; however, their lifestyles off the course were far from those of an athlete. Today, the professional golfers are very much involved with strength, flexibility, and mental training. The main part of the mental training is, “Staying in the Present” which is probably one of the hardest parts of the game of golf...*and life*.

Let me ask you. The first few times you had a good round of golf going, didn't you start calculating the remaining holes? Or, maybe you've done the same when you blew that good round. How do you play life, especially when the pressure is on? Do you “Maintain A Perspective” or do you project things out, just like on the golf course?

Think about it this way: *Anyone can fight the battles of just one day and when tomorrow gets here...It's Today.* The Bible tells us not to worry about our lives or what tomorrow will bring. So why is it that we find it so hard playing life “in the present, one day at a time?” I feel the following little poem hits it right on the head:

LET GO & LET GOD!

As children bring their broken toys with tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God because He was my friend.
But then, instead of leaving Him at peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help, with ways that were my own.
Then, suddenly I snagged them back and cried,
“God, how can you be so slow?”
“My child” He said, “what could I do?”
YOU NEVER REALLY DID...LET GO!

THIS is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in IT!
(Psalm 118:24)

Believe In Your Method

So far in our sports psychology tips, we have covered *Maintaining Perspective* and *Staying in the Present*. Now let's discuss *Believing in Your Method*.

The greats of the game have been referred to as either *swingers* or *strikers* of the golf ball. For instance, Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Bobby Jones, Julius Boros and Sam Snead are probably the most classic examples of the swingers. When you watched these golfers hit the ball, they appeared to be hardly even swinging the club. Their swings were very long and flowing.

On the other hand, some of the more famous strikers of the ball are Tiger Woods, Lanny Wadkins, and the most famous hands down, Arnold Palmer. When you watched these golfers hit the ball, they appear to be chasing and attacking the ball through impact. These guys all subscribe to the theory that the ball isn't going to get to the target by caressing it. While these are two very distinct approaches to hitting the golf ball, both groups shared one important element in common; they believed in their method.

The interesting part you find when observing these individuals is their method for playing golf is the same method they use for playing life. Those that had the long flowing swings were also known to be very easy going in life, and those that chased and attacked the ball did the same with life. Without a doubt, the most outstanding characteristic of these players is their immovable belief in their methods. Sure there were flaws, but their fundamentals were solidly engrained.

In a society of political correctness and corporate mirroring, are you a swinger or a striker at life? Does your God-given character match up with who you are striving to be? How sound are your fundamentals? To me, the most outstanding trait of these individuals is they moved from mediocrity to greatness by accepting the abilities and limitations God gave them, no matter how others felt or how unorthodox they may have looked.

Are you swinging or striking at the day today?

Mental Toughness

Tiger Woods shot 63 in the third round of this year's Memorial Golf Tournament and held over a five shot lead. As he was walking off of the 18th green, he looked over to his coach, Butch Harmon, and said, "Meet me on the practice tee...we have work to do." What work? A top amateur could probably have held Tiger's lead together through the last round. *Mental Toughness*, whether it's in life or golf, is about building a reserve. That's why Tiger was able to rise victorious when Sergio Garcia and Bob May mounted challenges during the last two P.G.A. Championships.

How's your reserve as you play the tough and unforgiving terrain at the Country Club of Life with its many obstacles, conflicts, difficulties, *and blessings*? Remember, as human beings we possess an unconscious competence to self-sabotage ourselves through rationalization and the smarter we are, the harder we'll fall. Can we call on that reserve when needed, or are we playing life like the rest of the P.G.A. Tour players are playing golf today; barely having enough reserve and as they shake to the finish, they hope the rest of the competition will make more mistakes than they will? Tiger's philosophy must come from a phrase I heard some years back, "*It's in the burning that comes the learning.*"

Stick to the Task

*You stick to the task until it sticks to you.
Beginners are many but ender's are few.
Our power, praise, and place will come in time to the one who stays.
You stick to the task until it sticks to you.
You bend at it, sweat at it, and smile at it, too.
And out of the bend, and the sweat, and the smile,
will come life's victory after a while.*

Inner Coaching

As we continue our segment in sports psychology, let's move into a very interesting topic, "*Inner-Coaching*." Lee Trevino is known in golf as "the incurable optimist." During a rain delay at a tournament, there was a group of golfers gathered in the locker room and the comment was made, "Do you realize how bad Trevino's swing is?" Rumor has it that Jack Nicklaus (who had recently fallen victim to Trevino's hustling tactics at the U.S. Open in Merion, Pennsylvania) said, "Why bother telling him? He won't believe it."

Trevino's optimism is very different from the talk I've both used and heard on the golf course since my caddying days. Instead, when hitting bad shots, the comment is more often, "I *always* do that" or, "I hit it there on this hole *every* time." I know this has got to sound familiar to amateur golfers and professionals alike.

Growing up in what is considered today to be the "inner city", my golf game was groomed on a public golf course, and to say that I came across some characters would be an understatement. These were average working guys that not only had cast iron stomachs when it came to competition, but they also thought they were better than they really were, and their results backed up their belief systems. They taught us caddies how to get someone's number (like Trevino did with Nicklaus.) If you could do that, the match was pretty much over before it ever started.

Who has your number in life? Is it a person, a job, or some other thing? That's where the destructive self-talk comes from as we play life. When it comes to inner coaching, the key to remember is that our battle is not against flesh and blood. Our minds can be renewed by putting off our former way of life and our old selves to be made new in our attitudes by living in the image of our Creator. Keep that inner coaching positive. God's doesn't make any junk!

Pre-Shot Mindset

Jack Nicklaus was probably the first golfer to stress the importance of the *Pre-Shot Routine*. On every shot, Jack would get into the zone. It wouldn't matter if he was leading or out of contention, he never changed his routine. He would pick a spot about a foot or two in front of the ball that was in line with his target. "Go to the movies," he said as he pictured the shot leave the club-head, take flight, and come to rest at its destination...*perfectly*. If Jack had the least doubt, he was known to back off of the ball and start the whole routine again. It was critical for his timing.

Most of us start each day in the same manner we begin a round of golf. We race to the golf course, get geared up, get on the first tee half out of breath and wonder why we don't play better. I've observed the same thing with most of the meetings I attend. The majority of the others who are scheduled to attend come late. I would almost be willing to bet that it's because they have a poor *pre-day routine*. They get up with just enough time to get out of the house (providing everything goes perfectly), they don't have a clear written plan for the day, road-rage sets in as they travel, and their timing is off before they ever start the day. I've never observed more people so totally spent first thing in the morning.

A sound pre-shot routine allowed Jack to back off of the ball and begin a new shot anytime. A sound pre-day routine will allow us to back off of the day and begin it new at anytime. But it takes practice and the same mindset that a golfer approaches their shot with because they know they are absolutely powerless over the result of the shot they are playing. I've seen many a "perfect" shot hit a sprinkler head or even the flagstick and end up, let's just say, somewhere less than perfect. The healthiest approach we can take for each shot *and day* is to surrender to the fact that no matter how powerful we are, we are still not in control of the outcome that stands in the way of life's "sprinkler heads" and "flagsticks".

Theodore Roosevelt was quoted as saying, "*Man proposes and God disposes.*" Matthew Henry tells us, "Each day brings its own cares and burdens; it also brings its own strength and supply, too. Let us mind present duties and then leave events and outcomes to God. By our daily prayers, we may procure strength to bear up under our daily troubles and then let none of these move us."

Sharpen your *pre-day* routine by beginning it with your Creator, admitting your powerlessness, and retiring from the outcome business.

Playing Into the Wind

Playing into the wind is one of the toughest conditions a golfer faces on the course. As with life, when we face strong opposition or things seem to be closing in on us from everywhere, we naturally brace ourselves and fight back with all of our might.

Golf is known as a game of opposites and so is life, if we're playing that game by the rules. For instance, the late great Bobby Jones, in his brilliant video on trouble shots, said that whenever he faced a shot into the wind, the first thing he did was accept the loss of distance in order that he could execute the shot - swinging in balance from within himself. As an additional tip, some professionals will even tell us to choke down on the club about an inch for better control.

When the wind is in our face and if we were to accept the loss of power in a situation, how do you think that would affect us so that we can still keep the balance in our lives and even cut down on our schedules in order to give our God full opportunity to work?

We are powerless against the wind, and we are powerless against the majority of what life deals us. No matter how well prepared we may be, we cannot guarantee the outcome on the course or in life.

Here's a thought...

As children bring their broken toys with tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God because He was my friend.

But, then instead of leaving Him at peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help with ways that were my own.

Then, suddenly, I snagged them back and cried...

God, how can you be so slow?

My child He said, what could I do?

You never did let go.

Playing Out of the Water

Today we are going to begin a series entitled “Trouble Shots”. The first trouble shot we are going to deal with is the deceptive attempt to play a ball from the water.

First: Whenever you attempt to play a ball from a brook or the edge of a lake, approach it knowing that what you see is *not* what you get. The ball will be deeper and look bigger in the water than it really is. Just look at a person standing in a pool and see how short their legs look, or the way coins appear sitting at the bottom of a pool. See it for what it really is; not what it appears to be.

Second: Bobby Jones said, “The hardest thing about hitting from water is keeping your eyes open.” Just think if you were to attempt to crush a stone with a hammer; it is a natural God-given reaction to shut your eyes as you strike the stone for your protection.

Water is considered a hazard therefore you can’t ground the club. You need to slightly hood the blade of a lofted iron, choke down on the grip, and give it one of those back-breaking blows. And maybe, just maybe, you might advance the ball.

So when we play from life’s brooks and lake edges, make sure you’re seeing the situation for what it really is. It’s critical that we are working with our caddie here, *who is that person in your life that you are accountable to, who knows you better than you know yourself, and who will remind you to keep your eyes open with this tricky shot from one of life’s hazards.*

The Bible tells us that we are to go through life with the keen eyes of a serpent. A good accountable relationship in our life is a second pair of eyes to help us see things for what they really are. Remember our opponent, “El Diablo”, will use denial to deceive us into thinking it is a way to protect ourselves or someone we love and it is almost a guarantee that if we play the game of life alone, we will miss the cut more times than not.

The Fairway Bunker

As we continue our series on “Trouble Shots”, today’s illustration is on the fairway bunker which is one of the more dreaded shots in golf.

It is very important to understand that fairway bunkers are hazards just like water and they are not there to beautify a course but to find our weakness and lure our shot in. It has always amazed me how golf course architects know exactly where to put these annoying buggers. Ben Hogan used to say that the hazards on a golf course were there not as trouble, but as a warning from what to stay away from. A good course manager will always try to shape a shot away from the trouble as Hogan did so masterfully.

Executing this shot is not all that difficult if the golfer has worked on sound fundamentals. The approach is to 1) Take one more club than normal, 2) Dig into the sand with your feet and be certain to choke down on the club to compensate for the feet being dug into the sand, 3) Move the ball back slightly in the stance to hit it clean, 4) Keep the lower body quiet. *And a little secret that Butch Harmon taught Tiger Woods*, 5) Pick up the chin slightly which will raise the spine angle which will also help in picking the ball clean.

There are many hazards in life that may look attractive but we should shape our lives away from them. However, there are times when we forget our limitations and our character defects and begin trusting ourselves a little too much. As a result, we get lured in. It’s at these times that we’re also probably not seeking the advice of our caddies and playing the game of life alone.

Playing from one of life’s fairway bunkers should not be all that difficult either if we keep in mind one of the soundest fundamentals given to us in The Lord’s Prayer...

”Lead Me Not Into Temptation!”

Ball Severely Above the Feet

A solid foundation is the key to maintaining balance in order to execute this very difficult shot as the ball begins to move in line with the golfer's head. Once the golfer plants their feet solidly, they will need to select an extra club, choke down on the grip, and swing very easily. Balance is critical to pulling off this shot.

A solid foundation is also the key to maintaining balance in our everyday lives as our schedules begin getting us in over our heads. In light of the tragic events of 9/11, we are beginning to hear more of the word "evil." One news commentator who heard New York's Cardinal Egan mention the devil in a sermon said, "I think this is something to really take seriously." Prior to the events of September 11th, if you mentioned the word "devil", you would have been looked at strangely. That's not the case any more.

In the words of the Christian classic, "On God the Solid Rock I Stand...all other ground is sinking sand." Remember, El Diablo is our competitor as we play the game of life. He's crafty and wants to get into our heads by throwing us off balance through clouding our thinking and wreaking havoc in our marriages and families.

Fred Mitchell, a leader in world missions, used to keep a motto on his desk that read, "Beware of the Barrenness of a Busy Life."

Ball Severely Below the Feet

If you've ever hit that dreaded shot known as *the shank*, then you'll know why the ball severely below the golfer's feet makes this one of the most dreaded shots in the game. To say that this particular shot has to be approached carefully and with humility...would be an understatement.

First, the golfer must widen their stance, flex their knees to set up a solid foundation, and then attempt to execute the shot, fully aware of their limitations because the golfer is completely powerless over the result of this shot.

In life, if we don't recognize our limitations and completely admit we are powerless over the results of our lives, our egos begin to allow self-centered motives to take over. I've been told that ego stands for "ease God out." As we reassume the role of God in our lives, one thing we do whether consciously or unconsciously is begin to associate with people that we feel are below us to continually reassure our sense of self importance. This false sense of security builds up our egos moving us further away from God.

Our caddie is critical here for reinforcement of what our real stance in life should be. In these times the reminder to flex our knees until they hit the ground in humility could be the best advice we could ever get. As our knees are securely on the ground, our prayer should be that we don't get up until we can see all people through the eyes of God.

One Foot in the Bunker, One Foot Out

We are doing a series on “Trouble Shots”, and we continue with today’s tip entitled, *One Foot in The Bunker and One Foot Out*.

To execute this shot, once again widen the stance and be sure your footing is firm, take one more club than normal, swing very easily keeping the lower body quiet since the foot in the bunker is going to slide.

When executing a trouble shot in golf, the key is to swing within your self. In life, many of the trouble spots we find ourselves in are a result of getting out of the zone of that person God created us to be. Hopefully, we will catch ourselves while we have only one foot in the hole.

Executing a trouble shot in golf is only a small part of the battle. The hardest part is the choice of laying up for a possible par and a definite bogey, or going for a career birdie and a possible triple-bogey...*or worse*. Remember, Sam Snead said that our biggest battle on the course is within our own minds.

When you come right down to it, our biggest battle in life is within our own mind also. Every day we must battle between the material view of life and the spiritual view. Who and what will guide our choice: money, greed, pride, selfishness? Or will we get together with our caddie in life (*that person we are accountable to*) and be guided into God’s direction of unselfishness, service, love, honesty, faith, and purity?

Yes, there is a choice as we “fight the battle” of life, but we can’t have it both ways.

What’s your choice today? And who will be guiding you?

The Uphill Lie

The “Uphill Lie” is a shot where the golfer must remain balanced. To execute this shot (1) Take one more club. No matter what the distance, the ball will go higher. (2) You must create and equal the playing field by leveling your hips and shoulders to the slope, or a fat (or chunk shot) will be the result. (3) The tendency from this lie will be for the ball to hook since the toe of the club head will pass the heel at impact. (4) Take a wider stance than normal. Balance is critical to this shot because gravity will pull you away from the ball. SWING EASY!

Now, what about those uphill battles in life? Maybe you’re facing one right now. Maybe you’ve even had more than your share in this life. In the Christian classic “The Christian’s Secret To A Happy Life” the author tells us that *discouragement* is El Diablo’s most successful psyche-out tactic. The book tells us that Satan feels if he can discourage man, he will conquer him.

So, (1) Create an equal playing field. Don’t fight this coward alone. Your caddie in life will be on the level with you. (2) Increase accountability and remain open to God’s word. The tendency is to roll over if we’re trying to do it alone. (3) Surround yourself with God’s Grace through His people. This will help you strengthen your stance in life so you don’t pull away.

Remember to “maintain perspective.” Here’s a thought. Did you know that if you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world?

Balance is critical when the gravity of life is trying to pull you away. TAKE IT EASY! We’ve been told that in this life we will have trouble and we can relax because God has overcome the world.

The Downhill Lie

The downhill lie is probably the toughest shot to get up into the air, because like the uphill lie, gravity enters into the picture but this time it is pulling you down.

To execute this shot, take one club less since the club head will hood at impact producing a lower ball flight, take a wider stance for balance and stability, and remember to level the playing field with your shoulders and hips. Swing easy and BE CAREFUL!

How many times in our daily lives have we been so sure of something that we use the expression, “it’s all downhill from here?” Another more popular saying today is that something is a “cake-walk.”

A word of caution: Take it easy and BE CAREFUL. As human beings, we all possess an unconscious competence to self-sabotage ourselves when operating from our own strength. Our opponent, El Diablo, is trying to use the gravity of his crafty tactics to pull us down and the surest way is by getting to our egos (Ease God Out) and filling us with over-confidence in ourselves.

Remember that accountability with someone else is the key to keeping the stability and balance in life and it’s the only way to level the playing field of life with Old Slick. Don’t shut down by getting a big head and starting to play the game as if you’re Superman.

When you catch a streak where life is dealing you all Aces, keep in mind that “this too shall pass.” Don’t get over-confident...and don’t play the game alone

I asked for strength that I might achieve;
He made me weak that I might obey.
I asked for health that I might do great things;
He gave me grace that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
He gave me poverty that I may be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
He gave me weakness that I might feel a need for God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
He gave me life that I might enjoy all things.
I received nothing I had asked for;
He gave me all that I had hoped for.

Keep Humble!

Living In God's Grip

Most new golfers begin by gripping the club with what is called a “strong grip.” This manner of gripping the club feels most natural and certainly gives the person hitting the ball the deception of having the most control.

Harvey Pennick, the late great teacher to many of the world's top golf professionals, was known for his wisdom. One saying he used pertaining to the grip was: “At first, the correct grip is uncomfortable and unnatural and, what makes it even worse is, there's even less power. But if you stick with it you will end up hitting the ball straighter and farther than ever before.”

Isn't that the same way we live our life before coming to know the proper Way, gripping it too strong? We go after the power and then, whether we realize it or not, our lives become unmanageable but we think we're still in control.

Then we're told to put our lives in God's hands, *in His perfect grip*. Tell me; don't you feel the same way gripping the golf club correctly at first: uncomfortable and unnatural and, even worse, out of control?

The golfers who develop solid games do so on sound fundamentals and any one of them will tell you, “the proper grip is where it starts.” Those who play golf and continue to do it “their way” end up frustrated and, many times, give up the game.

A top golfer knows that a swing change, many times, sets them back at first, but if they stick to it, they'll reach a new level. It's no different with the true greats in life. They know that the only way to have true control of their lives is to give up control, as they know it.

A golfer's grip on the club is the foundation for the golf swing. Having a grip on the Word of God is the foundation for effective living.

The Strong Grip - The Death Grip

As we begin the new season, let's continue to take a more in-depth look at the grip. In the original tip on the grip, I mentioned that most new golfers and those who remain average and frustrated grip the club with a *strong* grip. This is the most natural way to feel in control when hitting the ball, but it results in the most inconsistencies and problems.

When a right-handed golfer grips the club with a *strong* grip, for instance, their right hand is in such a strong position on the club that it puts the club in what is called a *shut* position on the top of the back swing. This causes an over-the-top move in starting the downswing and a variety of inconsistencies *and problems* in ball flight.

Wow! Doesn't this sound familiar to those of us who grip life too strong? We're so focused on controlling outcomes and our own destinies that we shut ourselves down from the things in life that should mean the most to us. As a result, a variety of inconsistencies...*and problems* in our lives occur.

There is hope however. Lee Trevino, Paul Azinger, Tom Lehman, and David Duval are great players who grip it strong. The difference is they are open at the address position, which compensates for the strong grip. They have *found their games* as a result of much accountability with a swing instructor.

Our God has made some of us with an intense nature and life needs them to be leaders and grip it a bit strong. However, despite their intense natures, the true greats in life live it openly and know there is a power much greater than them who is the true Master of outcomes.

The strong grip is the death grip. Remember, he who gains the world and loses his own life in the process falls short in the end because we are not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying, but we are in the land of the dying going to the land of the living. The basic Way to assure our true victory in this qualifying round of life is to use the proper Grip.

The Stance

If there was an award for the most meticulous golfer ever to play the game, my vote would have go to Ben Hogan. Those who had the privilege of watching one of his practice sessions (which took a full day) said it was the most incredible display of golf they ever saw.

If you've been around the game for a while, you know that Hogan had two careers as a result of a serious automobile accident. The doctors thought he would never walk again, never mind play competitive golf.

Prior to the accident, Hogan had a very long swing and fought a hook. While rehabilitating, he discovered his swing to be much shorter as a result of the injuries to his back and legs.

Due to his determination, he discovered that the precise angle of his feet determined the flight of the ball. By turning his front toe more to the target and squaring the inside of his back foot, he was able to keep his back swing shorter--putting less strain on his back and, best of all, he was now hitting a fade. The rest is history. Hogan went on to a second career and today is known as "the greatest ball striker the game has ever seen."

How meticulous have you been with your stance on life? What do you stand for? How do you use your money? Your time? Your talents? Businesses spend big money on positioning statements. What's yours for your life? What's your family's?

One little adjustment in the way we live can change the direction we are going. Get on that practice tee. Spend time with God. Be still and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you. No matter where life finds you today, you too can have a second career.

But For The Grace Of God Go We! – *"Find Your Game"*

The Setup

Another meticulous golfer is Jack Nicklaus. Jack is a great believer in *the basics*. He believes that the setup is 90% of the golf swing and 40% of mis-hit shots occur before the golfer ever swings the club.

For those of you who are non-golfers, the setup is made up of The Grip (the position of the hands on the club handle), The Stance (the alignment of the feet), the golfer's hand, hip and shoulder alignment, and their posture. The media reported just recently that Tiger Woods went out to meet with his instructor and worked on his setup for four hours.

Does that seem strange to you that the greatest golfer in the world today would work on a swing basic for four hours? It probably would if you're a person who gets sloppy with the basics in life. The Grip: turning *our lives and wills* over to God and living in *His* perfect grip. I can't, He can...Let Him! The Stance: What do you stand for? How do you use your money? Your time? Your talents? In general terms, who are you? What is the price that will get you to compromise what you stand for? I like to think of this as "my Judas streak." How do you line up on some of life's principles?

Bob Toski, one of the great teachers of the game, says over and over, "practice, practice, practice!" Unfortunately, too many people today say, "I don't have time to practice or apply these principles to my life." Why are so many people out of time today? My feeling is we are crowding our lives with noise due to some of those unresolved character impairments--you know, "Out of sight...out of mind." As human beings, we possess an unconscious competence to self-sabotage ourselves through rationalization and the smarter we are, the harder we'll fall.

Have You Taken Your Mulligan In Life?

You may have seen the movie *City Slickers* where three, young, middle-aged men go out on a mid-life crisis drill. While helping each other emotionally, the comment was made that life was a “do over.” Unfortunately, too many of us feel our second chance at life is another spouse, another job, another car, or another house.

In the recovery movement, this would be referred to as a “geographical cure.” It was once explained to me this way: “If all we have to do to get another chance at life is change our environments, then we should without a doubt be able to, on any given night, sleep in our garages, and we’d be certain to wake up a car in the morning.”

A mulligan gives a golfer a second chance to hit a shot during a *sociable* round of golf. It is described as a *local rule* used as a courtesy after the first tee shot on the first hole because many golfers are not warmed up. In recent years, mulligans have become a very popular means of fundraising at golf outings that benefit charitable causes. Their popularity indicate that golfers know they will need a second chance, want a second chance, and are even willing to *pay* for that second chance during a round of golf.

I’m sure in everyone’s life at one time or another we have all said, “if only I could do it all over again.” God’s grace has been described as “that love that just won’t quit.” Grace is our mulligan for playing the *game of life*. It gives us that second chance, third chance; fourth chance, fifth chance, etc. God loves each one of us so much, that His forgiveness for us *never* ends. It doesn’t matter where our lives have taken us; we just need to say a resounding **Yes!** to following Him with our lives.

As the Christian classic goes, “Amazing love how can it be, that thou my God shouldst die for me?” Unlike any other gift where “you get what you pay for,” this amazing grace works where the more you *give* away, the more supply you have.

Finding the Bottom of Your Swing

A golf club swung properly makes a perfect circle. The circle that the golf club makes has an exact bottom point with each club. Visualize this with me: The longer the golf club gets, the wider the circle, and the result is a wider bottom of the circle.

Any good instructor should know that a golfer's swing bottom is usually somewhere in line with their sternum. From that starting point, each golfer's swing bottom will vary slightly based on the plane of their back swing. The most popular method of confirming a golfer's swing bottom is to put a piece of masking tape on the bottom of the club, apply colored chalk, and then swing on a white piece of carpet. The mark the club head makes will indicate the golfer's swing bottom.

Professional golfers work hours on finding the *exact* bottom of their swing because they know that finding that point will allow them to strike the golf ball with razor like precision. This precision not only provides exciting backspin, but it also, more importantly, maximizes distance and accuracy. With the competition being as stiff as it is today, it is not until the golfer commits to putting that preciseness into their practice that they will be able to move forward and achieve maximum success with their games. The rest is based on a golfer identifying their strengths and accepting their weaknesses that build the confidence, which only a few possess, that make them the real winners in the game.

Have you found the exact bottom in your life? Have you come to that place in your life where you have come completely to the end of yourself?

Finding the bottom in our lives requires many hours of precise reflection with our coach, the Holy Spirit. There are many techniques that the Holy Spirit will use to help us find our *exact* life bottom. However, like the professional golfer, we can find it faster with the help of that person in our lives we are accountable to, who represents the tape and the chalk. If that person is really good, they may even help us raise our bottom and begin a precision lived life for Jesus Christ.

The Key to Winning the Big One

Any professional golfer will tell you that when in competition (and this especially holds true with the major tournaments) you must remain much focused and *play the golf course...not the field*.

However, the media doesn't understand this at all. At the 1998 Masters, the focus was on Fred Couples and David Duval for just about the entire final round. What happened? Quiet old Mark O'Meara sinks a putt on the 18th hole making it three birdies out of the last four holes to win. What about last year's US Open? All you saw was Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson and, on the last hole, Payne Stewart sinks a putt and wins. Interestingly enough, if you study the games of O'Meara and Stewart, you find two very classical swingers of the golf club with not one part of their games very flashy. A saying many golfers use to describe this type of player is "boring." They may be boring, but they are full of wisdom and patience.

What about when the heat is on in life? If you're like me, you tend to look at what others are doing that might be the cause of the heat. Adam and Eve proved that right from the start, didn't they? When God put the heat on them, didn't they resort to blame? Satan was clever enough to get them to focus on each other.

What a perfect time to consult with your caddie in life. Their advice will probably be a kind word to help you refocus, and a reminder that our battle in this round of life is not against flesh and blood; it's against good old Slick.

So the next time you find yourself playing on the deceptive "El Diablo Country Club" and the heat is on, remember we play golf "a hole at a time" and we play life "a day at a time", even a minute at a time if necessary.

“You the Man!”

“You the man!” A saying we hear at many sporting events, usually tagged to a sports hero.

At this year’s Players Championship, the golfing world observed veteran Hal Sutton as he set out to beat Tiger Woods. Lee Trevino did it to Jack Nicklaus on many occasions. Having been taught to be a hustler on the golf course in my early days, I can assure you this type of strategy is usually effective for the pursuer only if they can get into their opponent’s head. If they can’t, it can actually back fire and you had better be ready to pay up.

Remember who in life is our opponent. The Bible tells us to rejoice when we experience trials and struggles. I heard a quote by the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen. He said, *“there’s no greater tragedy in life than wasted pain.”* Many times, it’s hard for me to make sense of this thinking.

But think of it this way: Sports heroes are the people to beat in their respective sports. It is actually an honor to have an opponent stay up nights trying to put together strategies to defeat you. So, if life’s trials and struggles are bearing their ugly heads on your life, have your caddie remind you how important you are to *your* Precious God who made you so perfectly in His image. Seek *His* purpose in the struggle. Real winners put a value on a good struggle.

Remember that Satan had to get permission from God to put trials and struggles in Job’s life. He gave us His word that He will never give us more than we can handle and when temptations, trials, or struggles come, He’ll always provide a way out of them.

You the Man!

Timing

When you think of golfers with a finely timed golf swing, Ernie Els and certainly the late Payne Stewart's names would have to lead the list. Others throughout the years would include the likes of Sam Snead, Gene Littler, and Julius Boros.

It seems to be the opinion of the top instructors that timing is a reflection of our personal character. To put it simply, a "Type A" personality would probably swing faster than a "Type B."

There are various techniques in developing *effective timing* in a golf swing. Ernie Els swivels his head, Payne Stewart tapped the head of the club he was swinging on the ground before starting the back swing, Sam Snead and Gene Littler initiated things with a slight inward movement of the right knee, and Julius Boros' action became known as a soft-shoe shuffle.

We need to have an *effectively timed* life today to compete in the fast paced society we live in. A "Type A" personality will probably swing at life faster than a "Type B." There's an athletic event held in Europe called the Penthapolon. It involves five separate events and, in order to win, one must excel *in all five events*. God gives us five areas of responsibility and He wants us to do well in all five: our church life, family life, community life, personal life, and work life...*last*.

However, if we're not held accountable, ***work and success*** (a deceptive mistress at best) can become the other man or woman in our lives. They can actually cause a certain kind of emotional adultery to occur (*and you're getting this from an admitted work-a-holic.*). This is an addiction America applauds.

The critical factor in everyone's golf swing is applying your God-given character to your swing and rejoicing in the result, because that's who God made you to be. Do that and you will develop an *effectively timed* golf swing. If we accept our God-given abilities and gifts and eagerly use them to glorify God (no matter how mediocre they seem to be), then we will develop an *effectively timed* life as well.

Don't Do It Alone!

The Art of Practice

I mentioned in “The Stance” that Ben Hogan would practice one full day each week. There’s a saying, “You get out of life what you put into it” and that saying couldn’t be truer about golf also.

Do you put down your load once a week? How do you spend your Sabbath; fit in a church service, maybe a light Bible study (that doesn’t involve any work during the week) and go off to the soccer or baseball games, or maybe even fit some more work in?

What is the message you are sending to those who have not felt God’s precious Grace as you have? One of the things you’ll practice in a good day of reflection will be your “stance” on life.

There have been numerous writings and debates about the Sabbath that say that it was an old fashioned tradition and Sabbath wasn’t intended to mean Sunday. Remember, as human beings we possess an unconscious competence to self-sabotage ourselves through rationalization and the smarter we are, the harder we’ll fall.

In this day of asset allocation, how are we allocating one of the most precious assets God has given us...time? Think about it this way; in a 168-hour weekly time budget, ten percent of that time could be broken down into one eight hour day, still leaving time each day for a trip to the practice tee in the morning with your God or for a warm up of the day ahead, then ending the day with a time of reflection each night.

The art of practice for most of the PGA Tour professionals involves one full day of practice, a warm up before each round where the goal is just to get loose and hit the ball solidly, then find one swing thought for the upcoming round. However, the practice session after the round is very different; it is then the player reviews their round and practice specific areas of their game.

*“Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life.
In its brief course lie all the realities and verities of existence,
the bliss of growth, the splendor of action, the glory of power.*

*For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision.
But today, **well lived**, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.*

Look well therefore...to this day.”

Master the Rules - Know Your Options

Golfing great Bobby Jones called golf “a game for a lifetime.” When you hear the likes of Palmer, Player, Nicklaus, Nelson, and Snead talk about the “tradition of the game”, they are referring to the ethics that this great game is built on. What other sport would see a player call a penalty on himself?

Could you visualize a football player pulling out a flag from their uniform and calling a penalty, or a baseball player sliding into home and calling himself out on a close play? I don’t think so!

In golf, there are the rules established by the United States Golf Association, which govern play here in the U.S. Taken from these rules are local rules, used at every club. You might explain a local rule as a slight bending of the rules to speed up play, or to make it easier to play a particular hole.

The Bible is the official rulebook for playing the game of life. However, haven’t each of us set up our own local rules for our lives? Those rules allow us to play life so we speed up our success course, and certainly we play life skirting the out of bounds lines to make it easier for us. I’m sure you’ve heard the expression, “You gotta play the game!”

A trick that was used by many of the old caddies was to cut a hole in their front pocket. If their man missed the fairway with his tee shot and it landed in the high ruff or woods, the caddie would slip another identical make and number ball down the hole of their pocket and of course the ball would be found.

While that story is far from a local rule and just plain cheating, don’t many of us feel that we’re doing a good job playing the game of life if we’re just living a “good” life, using the local rules to govern play? And don’t we use those who are blatantly doing things wrong as our barometer for how good we are or how bad we’re not? I was taught early on that you always read Scripture in light of another Scripture verse. Using other verses as options helps clarify what the Bible is telling us, which helps us avoid establishing those local rules in our lives via the Gospel according to me.

What’s that saying from Snow White? “Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall.” You see our mirror really isn’t on the wall at all. The reflection I see beams deep from within me.

The real winners in life get up in the morning and look themselves straight in the eye when they look into the mirror, because they know there are no secrets in their lives. Golf is a whole lot more fun playing from the middle of the fairway, and life is a whole lot more fun playing it right down the middle in rigorous honesty and without self-established entitlements.

Ball Position

One of the most misunderstood parts of the golf swing is the ball's position in relationship to the golfer's feet when they are using the various clubs in the golf bag. I shared with you in the last tip the concept of the *swing bottom*. It is imperative that you thoroughly understand that concept in order to understand ball position.

Think with me. With the shortest club in the bag (*that being the Sand Wedge*) your stance would be at its narrowest (*feet closest together*) and as a result, you should find the golf ball exactly in the middle of your feet. Why is this? Visualize this with me. The shorter the club, the closer the golfer is to the ball, the narrower are their feet, and the more vertical the swing plane. As each club gets longer, it is the *back foot* that begins to inch further away from the front foot. That begins to put more of a horizontal tilt to the swing plane; widening the circle the golf club makes thus widening our swing bottom. Get it?

By the time we get to the Driver (*which is the longest club in the bag*), our back foot has moved back considerably from where it was with the Sand Wedge. Now our swing plane has become more horizontal than it was with the Sand Wedge, putting us to the point of our widest swing circle and bottom. However, the illusion here is how the ball never moves when we changed clubs. The only thing that has moved is our back foot. Try it out for yourself!

True, there have been some of us who have been given more to deal with in this life than others. But when the golf course deals us a bad blow, what's the first thing the professional does? They look at two shots, the safe shot and the gamble. In other words, they check out their options.

So no matter what life has dealt you or where you feel you are, don't succumb to the *feel good* life illusions of overachieving, overspending, the gathering of toys, etc. Make certain you are taking the safe option and keeping God at the center of where you stand in life and, like the golf ball, if you feel a distance between you and God...*guess who moved?*

Playing From Sand

I don't know whose idea it was to use bunkers (*sand traps as they were formerly referred to*) as obstacles on a golf course. However, there's no doubt in my mind that it's our opponent, *El Diablo*, who puts obstacles in our lives.

As I think of why I've hit the ball in bunkers over the years playing golf, I came up with the following reasons: poor judgment, a poorly executed shot, being unfamiliar with a particular golf course, or just being plain greedy and trying to get more out of a shot than I am capable of.

Bunkers are the most feared obstacles on the golf course. When taught to hit a ball from the bunker, we are told to hit two inches behind the ball. The majority of golfers will either produce a shot where the ball remains in the bunker because they are chopping at the ball, trying to hit a spot two inches behind it, or they will hit a skull shot (*a low lined drive shot, that sales across the green*) because they hit the ball first without hitting the sand.

Now that you are an expert on finding the bottom of your swing, we can analyze the proper approach to hitting a bunker shot. Visualize that swing circle again. If, on a normal shot from the fairway, the ball is placed at the exact bottom of the circle, where do you think it should be placed in the bunker?

You don't consciously hit two inches behind the ball; you simply move the ball two inches ahead of your swing bottom. This will cause your club head to enter the sand at the swing bottom, which, in this case, is two inches behind the ball. Based on various textures of sand and the distance of your shot, the distance the ball is moved forward will vary.

When in a bunker, the ball is merely a symptom of the problem we're in, which is the sand. Isn't that how we approach life's bunkers? Doesn't Satan have us deceived into putting a Band-Aid cure on the symptoms of our culture rather than getting to the cause of the real problems we face?

Let me emphasize again that finding the bottom in our lives requires many hours of precise reflection with our coach, the Holy Spirit. There are many techniques that the Holy Spirit will use to help us find our *exact* life bottom. However, like the professional golfer, we can find it faster with the help of that person in our lives with whom we are accountable.

F.O.R.E.!

I was thinking that every time a golfer hears the word *Fore!* yelled out on the golf course, they will usually react one of two ways: run for protection behind something or, if more than one of the players are near each other, they will usually shield each other. How natural it is for us to seek help and protection when we see trouble coming.

However, we need to be mindful as we play our life's opponent, *El Diablo*, because he is a master at sending trouble our way and blinding us so that we get hit. In an era when time is at a premium, studies indicate that less than three percent of men have a best friend. The time we have to mingle these days is usually spent with those who could be influential to us in some success mode. Where is it that we run to seek help and protection? No matter how intelligent or strong we are, we're still human and can't play the game alone.

In the tip *Where Have All The Caddies Gone* it says, "*You will never match or break par at the Country Club of Life's tough terrain alone.*" Hands down you need the protection of other people, *and* we need to get behind a loving and all-powerful God who we let take control over our lives through the encouragement of others.

So at *Game Of Life Foundation, G.O.L.F.*, the word *F.O.R.E.* stands for *Fellowship Offers Refuge and Encouragement*. By being part of a *G.O.L.F.* Fellowship group, you will be exposed to the encouragement of others and establish, re-establish, or deepen a protective relationship with the Lord against whatever life sends your way.

True *Fellowship* is not a secret invitation into a New Age-type elite, but a relationship with the Father, which entails responsibilities to others in God's family. God does not exempt people from every bad thing in life. Prosperity and health obviously make it harder to depend on God. When do you think most about God: when things are going well or when you are in trouble?

God's inescapable presence is a comfort and those who are against it cannot find *refuge*. We *all* need a model; an example of how we should live. Perhaps equally important, we need words of *encouragement* along the way.

Drive For Show - Putt For Dough!

The goal of most golfers is to hit the ball beyond the limits of their physical capabilities. **Power!** Whether it's in life or golf, many of us live for power.

I've researched a statistic that the average golfer shoots a score of 89. Surprisingly, that score is broken down with 54 shots within 100 yards of the green and only 35 shots from outside 100 yards.

In our desperate quest for power, we don't seem to realize that when we play at less than full strength, there are no physical limitations. It neutralizes the game. Even Tiger Woods has no advantage (except his work ethic) on us.

Power? What really is power?

God is not at all impressed with us as we try to be all-powerful. The Bible tells us to seek God's kingdom first, and everything you ask will be given to you.

Let's think about the following poem today as we strive for power:

God's Hall of Fame

Your name may not appear down here in this world's hall of fame.
In fact, you may be so unknown that no one knows your name.
The trophies, the honors, the flashbulbs here may pass you by,
And the neon lights of blue.
But if you love and serve the Lord then I have news for you.
This Hall of Fame is only good as long as time shall be,
But keep in mind God's Hall of Fame is for eternity.
This crowd on Earth they soon forget the heroes of the past.
They cheer like mad until you fall and that's how long you last.
But in God's Hall of Fame,
By just believing in His Son, inscribed you'll find your name.
I tell you friend I wouldn't trade my name however small,
That's written there beyond the stars in that celestial hall.
For every famous name on Earth or glory that they share,

I'd rather be an unknown here and have my name up there."

It's Not How You Drive - But How You Arrive!

There's an old saying in golf that the majority of long drives can be found in the woods. Only one player has completed a notable career known as an accurate long ball hitter, and that was Jack Nicklaus. The majority of the outstanding players in the game overcame adversity and actually turned what would have appeared to be a weakness into their greatness.

One of the most encouraging facts of life is that our weakness can become our greatest asset. Think about it this way: Kites and airplanes rise up against the wind. In climbing a mountain, we need the rough protruding rocks to aid us in our climb to the top. However, our weakness can only become our strength if we have the courage to face it. What's that saying? God doesn't make any junk because He makes us in His image and likeness. Instead, we try to earn the world's hall of fame instead of God's. There's not one of His perfect creations that are mediocre in His eyes.

Is it any wonder that Ben Hogan and Lee Trevino are known as the two greatest strikers of the ball the game has ever seen? Both were severe hookers of the ball in their early careers, and every shot they hit was a battle. Instead, they turned their right to left ball flights into a laser left to right ball flight. They turned their weakness into a winning strength and between the two of them (off the top of my head), they can account for approximately twenty major tournaments. They weren't known as power hitters, but they arrived on the green consistently. No one hit more greens in regulation than they did.

Think of how scary it is for a hooker of the ball (who is very closed in their stance and has a shallow swing bottom) to make the adjustment to become very open and widen their swing bottoms. I think it's the same way it has to work in life. It's only when we have the courage to change from our close-mindedness and open ourselves up and widen our life's bottoms (*in other words, make peaks out of the valleys through the help of others*), that we can find the true Power in our lives.

The Thrill of Victory and the Agony of Defeat

Maybe you've heard the saying, "If you want to see where someone becomes a champion, look at their daily routine. You can map out a life plan, but when the action starts, you're down to your reflexes."

True champions do the things their competitors won't, and they enjoy the things their competitors can't. A case-in-point is the routine Tiger Woods has, or the work ethic of Michael Jordan during his illustrious career.

A real life example for me was growing up in Stamford, CT with Bobby Valentine, the former manager of the NY Mets. It was not uncommon during the summer for Bobby to come walking down our street around 10:00 in the morning on his way to a 3:30 practice. He would grab every kid on the street who could either throw or catch a baseball, and who was willing to go and workout with him until practice started. I can still picture him running sprints around the track trying to beat his collie who ran like lightning.

It was clear since the days he played Little League baseball that he had a God-given ability that was levels above the other kids. However, there were a few others who were also very gifted (Stamford had some phenomenal athletes at the time) who were just not willing to make that commitment. Every time I watch a Mets game today, I'm so proud because Bobby is without question a perfect example of using the abilities God gives us in life, and getting out of it what we put in.

Are you playing the game of life with a solid daily routine that is getting so well tuned that your reflexes react to what life sends your way like the champion God made you to be? Or do you start out with good intentions, sort of like what we do with New Year's resolutions, only to see them fizzle away in a short period of time? Are you always late for appointments or find yourself racing through the day? How's your daily routine with God?

I remember being asked, "When you breathe your last, will you be able to have inscribed on your tombstone the words, '*It is finished*'? Or will your tombstone read, '*Dead, but never used up*'?"

Natural Golf

There's a new swing method beginning to sweep the golfing world called "*Natural Golf*." Being a person who is *naturally* resistant to change, but a student of the golf swing (for more years than I wish to admit), I spent the last year somewhat peeking at the method. I guess that in my subconscious mind, I knew what I was seeing had some validity to it. Then, several months ago, I purchased the program...and it is a swing method that I feel can revolutionize golf.

Basically, the premise behind *Natural Golf* is to (1) remove one angle from the traditional golf swing, and (2) make a more lateral move at impact, eliminating the traditional turn, which results in a wider swing bottom. This is called "*Square Tracking*." The result of the *Natural Golf* swing method is a more consistent, longer, and straighter ball flight. The more I study this swing method, the more I'm coming to realize that the *Natural Golf* swing method is a simple approach to swinging at life. It replaces technique with target.

If you're at all like me, you play life at times flirting with its out-of-bounds lines. You know, you bend it a little here and there, rationalizing your move and figuring out how you will land on your feet. We govern our lives, passing our own bill of rights, and instituting our own entitlement programs that give us the edge.

As I've become more proficient with the *Natural Golf* swing method, I've realized that it is the exact approach we should use as we play life. Think about it with me. You have fewer angles in your life, and you really hit a bottom that makes you willing to give up the control of your life (name me one golf course you have control of?) Therefore, you will eliminate the "*natural* turning away and seizing back the control" effect when life doesn't go your way...*on your schedule*. You will replace the *technique* of political correctness we've so finely tuned to function today in our impersonal business lives and our personal lives.

Finally, we can become more focused on God, our target for life. Miraculously, we find ourselves living straighter and going farther in life than we had ever planned, leading to a much happier and peaceful life.

D.I.V.O.T.

A divot on a golf course is a hole that is made when hitting a golf ball. One of the most feared shots in golf is when the golf ball comes to rest in a divot hole.

Our mission with *G.O.L.F* is to use the golf environment as a fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism opportunity. When we explained the meaning of the word *Fore*, we said it stood for *Fellowship Offers Refuge and Encouragement*. Divot, on the other hand, stands for *Discipleship Illuminates Valiant Obedience and Trust*. Let's explore this.

A properly struck golf shot finds the divot in front of where the ball was at rest. This is the point just past the golfer's swing bottom. So, if you ever find yourself sitting in an old divot hole, approach the shot as follows: (1) Take one more club than you would normally use from that distance. (2) Open the face of the club slightly. (3) Choke down on it. (4) Strike the ball using a downward blow. It is critical to the success of this shot to know the exact bottom point of your swing since there is no room for error.

The next time you find yourself in one of life's holes, approach it as follows: (1) seek the guidance of at least one person in the fellowship you can trust, (2) open up to that person, (3) show your obedience to God, choke on your pride and, (4) be valiant and cut sharply into the problem.

Discipleship helps people find their bottom in life, and begins to let God's precious grace illuminate to others through their lives. God's power in our lives will continue to increase as our ability to understand His grace increases. The power of God's grace will be limited only by the understanding and will of each of us.

Discipleship will illuminate valiant obedience and trust only when we are clear on the fact that we merely carry the message, and the Eternal Messenger can only determine the outcomes in our lives.

E.A.G.L.E.

In keeping with the *G.O.L.F.* mission of using the golf environment for fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism, we look at another golfing term: “Eagle.” For our purposes, Eagle stands for *Evangelism Affirms God’s Loving Embrace*.

An eagle is said to be a more skillful shot than a hole-in-one. It’s an approach shot that requires the golfer to be long enough off the tee to reach the green. However, the tee shot is only half the battle. Now the golfer must negotiate their lie before playing the approach shot.

The flight of the ball is pre-determined by the lie of the approach shot, i.e. uphill, downhill, side-hill, tall grass, or thin grass. If you don’t approach the lie on its terms, then the chance of hitting the green is nil, never mind knocking it in the hole. A caddie is extremely important here to help the player “maintain perspective” and remind them of the fact that they are completely powerless over the lie. They need to help the player by affirming their abilities pertaining to their natural ball flight and trajectory.

Hopefully after the time we spend in fellowship with someone and then begin to buddy up with them, they are pretty convinced of their powerlessness and are beginning to gain a new perspective on life in order to hear the evangelism message. Just like each golfer has natural abilities that affect a shot, each person has natural abilities to affect change in a person’s life.

Every good caddie needs to perfect their caring and sharing skills so they don’t have to think of what to say to communicate to their players in critical moments that empower them. When we evangelize, we need to perfect our caring and sharing skills to empower those we have fellowshiped with and are discipling when the critical moment is upon us.

Remember in “Finding the Bottom of Your Swing” we said that finding our exact swing bottom takes hours of practice with a good instructor, and finding our exact life’s bottoms takes hours with the Holy Spirit. Sharing God’s loving embrace should be natural to all who have found the bottom of their lives.

Playing From the Tall Grass

Playing from the ruff has always been where you had to be big and strong to really have any success in the golf game. While there is certainly a technique for playing this shot, *knowing yourself and your capabilities* is critical here. Two of the leading killers in our society today are *greed and instant gratification*. We want it all and we want it now. What ever happened to earning things as we go and working our way to the top? Or better yet, being satisfied with mediocrity?

We're told that the way to hit a shot from the ruff is to open the blade of the club head (because the club head will close up at impact), don't ground the club (so you don't hit anything on the back swing that will close the club head), widen your stance for more stability and make a swing that may throw your back out. The smart golfer who knows themselves and their capabilities approaches this shot while *maintaining perspective* on things. Their choice is to *just get the ball out*.

Isn't this a great way to play it from the tall grass of life? When we find ourselves here, many of us just dig in and swing at things as hard as we can and many times our situation just trickles like the ball and we're no better off and, many times, worse off then when we started. We want it over and we want it over NOW!

Some of you may remember the late Arch Bishop Fulton Sheen. I heard a statement he made that went, *"There's no greater tragedy in life than wasted pain."* However, even if you decide to just get the ball out of the ruff, you may still not succeed if you don't open up the club head; and if we are just trying to get out of some of the tall grass of life, and we don't open up our hearts, we are not going to get out either.

We don't want to make the decision for this shot without our caddie right by our side.

Rub of the Green

The United States Golf Association defines Rub of the Green as follows:

A “rub of the green” occurs when a ball in motion is accidentally deflected or stopped by any “outside agency.” An outside agency is any agency not part of the match or, in stroke play, not part of the competitor’s side and includes a referee, a marker, an observer, or a forecaddie. If a ball in motion is accidentally deflected or stopped by any outside agency, it is a rub of the green; no penalty is incurred and the ball shall be played as it lies. Let me give you a real life example of this rule:

In the 1998 U.S. Open, Payne Stewart hit a tee shot that came to rest in a sand-filled divot. Payne suggested to the rules official that this particular lie was ground under repair (which I personally think was a clever opinion). However, the rules official declared it a rub of the green, and Payne had to play the ball as it lied.

For a golfer of Stewart’s caliber, this was not a hard shot. To execute this shot, you open the blade slightly, choke down on the grip, keep the lower body quiet, and aim to the left of the green (if you are a right-handed player). This shot will produce a slight fade since the toe of the club will trail the heel at impact if executed properly.

However, Payne allowed the decision to rent space in his head and he proceeded to hit the shot into the bunker which resulted in a bogey and a second place finish. Does this sound familiar regarding our everyday dealings with life? How many times has something not gone our way and we continue to press our point so much that it ruins the rest of the day and maybe even damages a relationship? We get filled with the “poor me’s”, which result in those damaging hardening of the attitudes that just make ourselves and everyone around us miserable.

We can all think of things that happened in our lives that were just not fair, some of them minor and some major. However, we are always left with two options: (1) make lemonade from the lemons we are given or, (2) take the above approach. There will always be times when life will not give us a second chance.

Some of the most wisdom-filled advice I’ve ever been given for playing the game of life was as follows: Acceptance is the answer to all my problems. When I get disturbed, it is because I have found some person, place, thing, situation, or some fact of my life unacceptable to me; and I will find no peace until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at that moment. Unless I play life completely on life’s terms, I will not be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world, but on the changes that need to be made in me and my attitudes.

The most comforting guarantee we have is that God will always work for the good of those who love Him.

Target vs Technique

There is an unwritten law in golf which all of the top players follow known as the law of the “Two T’s”, Target and Technique. Psychologists tell us that it is impossible to totally concentrate on two things at any one time. How many golfers have you heard say, “There are too many things to remember when I hit the ball”? Let’s think about this.

Every shot we hit during a round of golf ends up at a target. Hopefully, it’s the target we were aiming at. What most golfers don’t realize is that their practice time is when to work on technique. On the golf course it’s you and a target. A golfer will NEVER be able to successfully compete under pressure if they use the law of technique on the golf course.

All good golfers will say that when they are playing at their best, they feel they are one with their target. The reason most weekend or occasional golfers tell us they can’t practice technique properly is because they “don’t have the time.” It seems today we “don’t have the time” to do very much, but yet our schedules are always full. So with no time to practice technique, these golfers find themselves round after round on the golf course trying the impossible by playing under the law of technique.

Isn’t this exactly the same way we play the game of life today? We’re so stretched on time that we apply technique to our competitive environments in life. We’re so conscious today of how we look, how we dress, how we speak, what we drive, where we live, the activities our children participate in, or who we associate with that we forget about our target in order to have true victory in this life.

Some years ago I was told that my target in life was God, and He stood for Good Orderly Direction. Golfers are in awe of how Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods are able to get into the zone and become one with their target. It is the result of their ability to become one with their target that they are able to produce the results they do.

We will find that our technique is not what has a lasting impression on people we come in contact with; it is the result of practicing that technique as part of our lives in quiet communion with our God, and the fruits that practice-time produces as we live as one with our Life Target. Once you make the decision to put God in the center of your life, you have been commissioned to show Him to others.

Remember, acceptance is the key to successful living. For some of us, this may mean acceptance of just being mediocre in a society of such accomplishment. But soon you will realize that God has never created a mediocre being in His eyes.

Finding Your Game after a Winter Layoff

Slammin' Sammie Snead was quoted as saying, *"The game of golf is the ultimate battle within yourself, not another player or the golf course. To play well, you must manage yourself."*

The Bible tells us that the game of life is the ultimate battle within our self, not another person, place, or thing. Certainly after a long winter layoff, it seems like we are definitely in a battle against our self and the golf course. It is *"man against the elements at its best."*

So keep this in mind: Grip the club very lightly, (I like to even shorten up on the grip a little), widen your stance, the ground will most likely be a bit soft after the thaw, shorten your swing, and just make contact with the ball. Forget about power? Yes, forget about power. You can't control this outcome. See how good of a course manager you are.

Finding your game after a winter layoff is like building new relationships in which to share the *Good News*, and with the upcoming *Mission Connecticut with Luis Palau*, what a perfect time to build new relationships.

So keep this in mind: Grip a new relationship very lightly at first, widen your stance on life a bit, a person seeking in life will most likely be a bit soft and scarred in places they can't even see, take a short swing at the relationship at first, just make contact with the person and forget about the outcome. Yes, forget about the outcome. See how good of a life manager you are, leaving the results to the ultimate Power.

Good places to start new relationships are with those with whom you have regular contact. Write their names down and put them either on your refrigerator or in your Bible, whichever you open the most, and pray for them daily. Miracles happen when we ask God to move in the lives of people.

A.C.E.

Ace is a golfing term for a hole-in-one and the interesting thing about a hole-in-one is that many are made as a result of a less than perfect shot. Nevertheless, the end result is considered a *perfect* score. For example, I know a golfer who hit a worm burner off the tee on a particular par three hole with a trajectory so perfect, that it skimmed across the lake in front of the green and rolled right into the hole.

This sounds like the lives that many of us lived before we began abiding in Christ with an eternal focus to our lives. We skimmed life playing it right next to the out-of-bounds lines most of the time. We lived with half-hit truths that protected us as we spent many a day looking over our shoulders.

But for God's grace we are now able to live life to its fullest. Christ is, without a doubt, our Ace in life and for our purposes, A.C.E. stands for *Abiding in Christ Eternally*. Abiding in him is our assurance that we can hit it imperfectly in life here on earth, but the outcome will be eternally *perfect*.

Going Out Lost Forever

Most people take up the game of golf with a general understanding and find that they spend most of their golfing lives frustrated and making up excuses for their poor performance; and let's not forget looking for that quick fix to take ten or more shots off of our scores. If there's ever been a game where powerlessness rules, it's this game.

While I haven't seen everything this game has to offer, I have seen a tee shot hit another ball in mid air that was coming off another tee, and I've seen a shot that should have been a hole-in-one where the ball ended up half in the hole because a player in the prior foursome got mad and put a gash in the cup. Another was a perfect approach shot that was heading right at the flag and then hit a sprinkler head and shot off into the bunker. Golf is definitely a game where you had better be out of the outcome business, because it won't be long until you're brought to a place of humility.

Isn't this the same way many people swing at life? We go at it with a general understanding and find that we spend most of our lives frustrated and making up excuses for things, and let's not forget the quick fixes to take off ten or more pounds, or another mortgage that will give us a clean slate. Whether it's in life or golf today, we seem to live with a "microwave mentality."

While I haven't seen everything this life has to offer, I have seen more than one business deal blow up that was just about to close, and I've seen the second mortgage refinanced several times because something was wrong with the clean slate approach the person was being sold on. Or how about some of our relationships where we have fine-tuned various insanities we live with by trying to change or manipulate the other person, and then finding that all things just continue to blow up? Life is definitely a game where you had better be out of the outcome business, because it won't be long until you're brought to a place of humility. Problem here is many of us don't see the reason for the humility because we're playing life in a state of terminal uniqueness.

For our purposes *G.O.L.F.* stands for *Game Of Life Foundation* where we encourage people to play life in fellowship with God and with other people. Whether it's in life or golf, complete surrender of our lives to a power outside of our control is the foundation of serenity. If we continue to play life in a state of terminal uniqueness, that *G.O.L.F.* could end up standing for *Going Out Lost Forever*.

Pressure vs Preparation

Whenever Jack Nicklaus is asked how he was able to make so many pressure putts on the eighteenth hole during his illustrious career, his response without hesitation is “preparation.” Prior to a tournament, Jack was known to prepare by building a game around his strengths. He would say that playing under pressure should be fun--that’s what you work so hard for.

Don’t you have fun when your life is under pressure? Fun? Are you crazy? We have been forewarned that in this world we will have trouble and we have been told that God has overcome the world. Are you “staying in the present” and “maintaining perspective”?

How well are you preparing for the pressure as you play the game of life? Do you have a steady caddie to help you carry the baggage that life sends your way, or are you battling the field alone? Are you playing life from within your strength, having accepted the person God created you to be for His glory? How’s your daily quiet time? Are you so “in the zone” that you act or react under pressure? When the competition of life mounts its charge, recite the following...

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time.
Enjoying one moment at a time.
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.
Taking as you did, Lord, this sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it.
Trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will.
That I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with you forever in the next.

Dealing With Life's Loose Impediments

Definition of a Loose Impediment according to the United States Golf Association...Rule 23

“Loose impediments” are natural objects such as stones, leaves, twigs, branches and the like, dung, worms and insects and casts or heaps made by them, provided they are not fixed or growing, are not solidly embedded and do not adhere to the ball. Sand and loose soil, are loose impediments on the putting green but not elsewhere. Snow and natural ice, other than frost, are either casual water or loose impediments, at the option of the player. Manufactured ice is an obstruction. Dew and frost are not loose impediments.”

Most of the loose impediments life sends our way we can move by ourselves. However, in the Book of Job, Satan went to God for permission to put some rather large loose impediments in Job's life, and we can be sure that “Old Slick” will do the same thing in our lives...guaranteed. So what do we do?

Some of you may remember a scene a few years ago where a group of spectators moved a large rock (a loose impediment) for Tiger Woods. While Tiger has not only mastered the game, he's mastered the rules. A brilliant move! Jack Nicklaus always said, “The rules are there to help, not hurt the golfer.” I'm willing to bet that even Jack with all his greatness would not have been as on his game as Tiger was with that one.

So now I'm going to make your day. There's something you can do as good as Tiger. When one of life's “big” loose impediments gets in your way...ask for help just like he did. Get your gallery involved...it's obviously within the rules. By your gallery I'm referring to your men's, women's, or other support groups you may be a part of. They're in your life rooting for you! They're there to help you move those “big” loose impediments life is sure to put in your path.

Trouble today is the rules for Godly living, known as “The Ten Commandments,” have been re-defined to “The Ten Suggestions” for what we consider Godly living in modern times. Rather than mastering the rules and gaining wisdom, we bend the rules using common sense. Keep in mind however, common sense is given to everyone; wisdom on the other hand is given only to those who follow God and show Him the obedience and reverence He deserves. That's why there are few Jack's & Tiger's in either life or golf that really reach the top of their games.

While we're on the subject, maybe moving that rock was not all Tiger's idea. Maybe his trusted caddie, Stevie, was more on his game than Tiger was, or so they say. Here I go sounding like a broken record again, get your caddie in life involved also. Did you get one yet, or are you still going through life like Superman or Superwoman?

Playing Blind Holes

Throughout most of my golfing career, I have always thought I was a golfer who was not only gifted at playing golf courses where there were lots of blind shots, but especially where there were blind tee shots. For those of you who are non-golfers, a blind shot simply means you can't see your target. You hit the ball and trust the *result* from there. In golfing terms when a golfer has difficulty with these shots, they're said to be "steering" the ball which simply means they're trying to control the result of a shot they can't see. Here is what happens:

The golfer gets over the shot and unconsciously sabotages their swing because of the fear of the unknown. Best thing about it, you feel as though you are making a perfect swing and if you are a golfer, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Just the other day as I was playing one of these blind holes, the light went on and I realized I play blind holes exactly the way I play life. What can I say? I'm a late bloomer. Let me explain; maybe you can relate to this.

Whenever I couldn't see where I would land in life, or in other words, when I couldn't see the result of something, I'd unconsciously swing into my control mode. Best part about it, I did this feeling my life was totally surrendered. I would rationalize that this was the way God made me. Fact of the matter was--and still is in many instances—I had a plain mistrust of God to steer my life, and a fear of where He might have me land, especially if it's not in my game plan.

When another good golfer is watching someone steer the ball, they can plainly see their faults. And when someone is steering their life, those around them can plainly see their faults. Recently I was reading a favorite devotional of mine and I came upon a quote that I'm glad I was sitting down when I read it. It was as follows and I ask you to read it carefully and more than once...

"A Christian's performance either verifies or contradicts who they claim to represent. The reputation of Jesus Christ rides on the consistency of our performance to many outside the church. Claiming to be a follower of Christ places a burden on the Christian, which most are not willing to totally assume, and therefore their lives are a reproach to Christ. Their witness for Christ is nothing more than a caricature, a misrepresentation, a distortion of what a Christian really is. Thus their lives repel men from Christ and from His church. This person lives their life like someone riding two horses at once that are running in opposite directions, and the strain is terrible."

I guess this is a more articulate way of describing how we steer our lives by trying to control the people, places, and things around us. One way a good golfer learns to build trust when playing blind shots is by learning and accepting enough about themselves to gain the confidence to play to their strength by hitting a shot that is most natural to them. One way a true follower of Christ learns to build trust is by knowing and accepting their gifts and by gaining confidence in who they are in Christ, so they can naturally find the strength they need when faced with one of life's blind shots or holes.

The Battle at Big Horn

Don't know about all of you, but I was like a kid on Christmas morning watching Nicklaus and Woods play Trevino and Garcia last night. While Tiger was nothing short of magnificent with nine birdies, it was obvious that Tiger was impressed hearing Lee Trevino call Jack Nicklaus' second shot to the ninth green. If you weren't watching, as Jack stood over his approach shot, Trevino whispered to Woods, "This is the biggest gallery so far today and this guy rises to the occasion." Nicklaus proceeded to hit his shot inches from the hole. As the crowd roared Woods was overheard saying in amazement to Trevino, "I can't believe it! You called that shot!" He replied, "I know that guy like a book!"

When Trevino burst onto the golf scene at the age of 26 in 1966, Jack Nicklaus eleven months his senior (that was the inside joke going on last night between Jack and Lee because Lee won't be sixty two until December) was dominating the world of golf. "Fat Jack," as some referred to him, was beginning to put the end to "Arnie's Army" and the fans were not happy.

Then Trevino made his way on pure determination from the Horizon Hills Country Club in El Paso, Texas where he did everything from giving lessons to cutting greens at \$35 plus tips each week, to the P.G.A. Tour with his sights on Jack. He did in fact know Jack like a book and Trevino got pumped every time Jack showed his face. "Lee's Fleas" then formed with galleries made up of average, working, men. The challenge to Jack would mount over the years eventually capturing the amazement of the entire golfing world. There was nothing pretty about Lee's game except he could get the job done when he needed to.

How many of us really know our real competitor in life, "Old Slick", like a book? Are we out with a hunger to see him defeated in our lives? Better yet, have we even really identified him? Do we know him like a book or do we continue to blame the people, places, and things around us when life mounts its challenges and we fail the test?

Unlike Lee, we live in a day when we're more concerned with how pretty we look, what everyone thinks of us, and how they view us. It's also based on the condition of the world, our families, and our morals in general, or when it's obvious we're having a hard time getting the job done.

Unconscious influence is what counts in the long run. That's a person's real influence; not what we say when we carefully choose our words or actions as we try to impress the world while the camera is on us and we're on our best behavior. Think about it this way; many a child has been scarred for life by the unconscious influence of their parent(s). Our character is molded and our future echoes that molding no matter how deeply we've vowed to be different.

We need to quit trying to be what we're not and begin just getting the job done. We need to identify our needs and weaknesses and stop playing God in our lives and give the controls over to Him. If we're really authentic, we know our sinfulness, we've faced those voices that lurk in the darkness of our minds and hearts, and most of all, we know we are inadequate and in need of a Power greater than ourselves.

Saved - But Not A Clue!

As a young caddie, I remember working hard toward the purchase of the sweetest looking Tommy Armour Persimmon Driver I had ever seen. When I gripped that club it felt just like it was molded to my hands. When I looked down at the head of the club, I knew the ball was ready to take a ride. Now, it was actually time to hit this miracle club.

So, on the next Sunday afternoon, my father and I went out to play after I finished caddying. I addressed the ball on the first tee and hit the most beautiful high draw I had ever hit in my short golfing career. As I watched the ball in flight, a friend yelled from a distance, “Who is that man?” I proudly posed following that tee shot, and I remembered thinking, “You look good, but what in the world did you do to hit that high draw?” I hadn’t a clue of what I just did!

I don’t know about you, but there are times when I look at my walk with Christ clueless and can hear Him saying, “Who is that man?” Sure I look good, sometimes even sound good, but what’s my life really saying to all those with whom I interact?

Dr. Richard Halverson, former Chaplain to the U.S. Senate, writes of a great Danish theologian who was led into disillusionment as a boy when he observed the glaring inconsistencies in the lives of the members of his church. “He found it impossible to understand a piety that seemed to take God seriously in the sanctuary on Sunday and then live as though there were no God the balance of the week. He asked himself a very penetrating question, ‘How do you make Christians out of people who are already Christian?’”

The answer to this question lies in whether the insight we have for another is spiritual or not. Do we pray for others who are not in agreement with us spiritually or do we criticize them and judge their salvation and their lives? Do we conduct ourselves between Sundays as one who claims to be a follower of Christ? Do others see Christ in us?

“Recently, I unfortunately witnessed an epidemic of intellectual arrogance spreading around our local Christian community,” shares one local pastor. I personally hear all too often about being a “new creation” but little about being crucified with Christ. This year I had been at several large leadership conferences where I observed many Christian leaders interact with the public, I was frankly shocked and ashamed. Halverson was right on as he concluded the above by saying, “Perhaps the reason those outside the church take Christianity with such a grain of salt and skepticism is they see so little authenticity in those who claim its label.”

Unlike working and earning something, true salvation can’t be earned. It’s there for the asking. “Ask and you shall receive,” we’re told. A golfer can survive only so long clueless after executing a perfect shot if they don’t get to the precise bottom of their swings and understand clearly how that swing bottom can affect every shot they hit. In the same way, one who claims to be a follower of Christ can only survive clueless for a while, however, until we get to the precise bottom of our lives and understand that it’s only in coming *completely* to the end of ourselves that our hearts will become a true Bethlehem for the Son of God.

“Keep It Simple”

There’s a saying in golf that trees are 90% air...*and it’s true*. As a caddie I played golf almost every day with a friend who was fearless on the course. While we knew he would never be a brain surgeon (and he’s not), because of his simple attitude, he seemed to find the air in the trees every time and I can tell you it made whoever he was playing with nuts when he would tell them, as his ball went through the trees, that he played the shot that way.

There’s something to be said about simplicity in golf. Moe Norman, the inventor of the *Natural Golf* method, is known as a “*simple guy*” and because of the *simplicity* he approaches the golf swing with, he *simply* hits every shot straight. Speaking from experience, those of us who find ourselves struggling on the golf course can usually attribute it to over-complicating things, which is a result of over-thinking. Over-thinking in golf is the leading cause of slumps.

Psychologists tell us that 90% of the things we worry about never happen. I guess we can look at it as worry is 90% air. So then, why don’t we just take God at His word and approach life with less fear and control as He tells us to do in the Bible over and over again? It’s because we over-complicate our lives by the paralysis of analysis resulting in the majority of us being 90% full of “hot-air.”

In life the slumps we experience from over-thinking come out in the form of depression, anxiety, anger, and fear, to name just a few. Jesus simply said, “I have come that you may have life...*and have it in abundance*.” He also tells us, “Whoever gains the whole world will lose his life.” Sam Snead said that golf, *like life*, is a battle between the ears.

Where’s your life today? Are you keeping it simple and seeing the obstacles in your life as 90% air or are you uptight and/or maybe even unhappy in certain areas of your life? We really need to look at this closely in a time where a popular saying has become...**“Get a life!”**

Jesus tells us, “I am the Way the Truth and that ***Life***.” See how simple He makes it for us! Now, find a caddie to help you carry your bag of complication in your life. This may just be the thing that finally helps you **“Get a “real” life.”**

There’s a saying that 90 parts in 100 of the cares of life are cured by one single salve, and that is, **“Thy Will Be Done!”** The moment I can say that *and really let go*, at that moment more than 99 parts in that 100 of my trouble drop away.

Do yourself the biggest favor of your life...**“Keep It Simple!”**

“That Don’t Count”

Recently I was playing a round with some friends. One in particular was hitting the ball extremely well, and then we came to a hole that had been his menace. Wouldn’t you know, on that hole he hit a shot to the right, into the lake, which he seemed to hit every time. Out of frustration he said, “That don’t count! I’m taking a mulligan!”

Is that a picture of life or what? Isn’t this exactly the picture Jesus wants to paint for us? So many who have not taken His hand think Christianity is about being holier than thou. However, it’s just the opposite, just the way golf is a game of opposites. What Jesus came for are those of us who hit it in life’s hazards; for those of us who get pulled into certain sin-patterns in life. So, I guess He came for us all.

Basically when you really think about it, Jesus’ death on the cross made the statement to our lives that what we’ve done in the past...well, “That don’t count” and He gives us continuous mulligans to help us play the game of life through His grace just by humbly asking Him into our hearts.

Most people have difficulty hitting a golf ball because they assume what they think to be the obvious. They think because the ball goes in to the air that they have to scoop it off the ground when it’s just the opposite. You actually have to hit down on the back of the ball to make it get airborne. Isn’t it pretty much the same in life? We think that to get ahead we have to scoop up every opportunity that comes our way instead of getting down on our knees and looking up to God for His guidance and His *will* for our lives.

I’ve taught the golf game for years, and you know why most golfers never get any better? They don’t ask for help and they try to fix swing problems themselves. Well most of our lives don’t get any better because we don’t ask for help (especially us men) and we try to fix life’s problems ourselves.

So the next time you’re on the golf course and you’re tempted to say “That don’t count”, ask a professional for help. And the next time you’re wishing for a “do over” in life, think of Jesus and try asking Him to come into your heart fully. Take the advice of that famous sport’s saying and “Just Do It!” After all, it’s because we couldn’t be holier than thou, and yes, that we’re all just a bunch of hypocrites that He came in the first place. Jesus died so we would have another *real* shot at life.

The Unplayable Lie

Rule 28 Ball Unplayable: *The player may declare his ball unplayable at any place on the course except when the ball is in a water hazard. The player is the sole judge as to whether his ball is unplayable.*

If the player deems his ball to be unplayable, he shall, under penalty of one stroke:

a. Play a ball as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played (see Rule 20-5);

or

b. Drop a ball within two club-lengths of the spot where the ball lay, but not nearer the hole; or

c. Drop a ball behind the point where the ball lay, keeping that point directly between the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped, with no limit to how far behind that point the ball may be dropped.

d. If the unplayable ball is in a bunker, the player may proceed under Clause a, b or c. If he elects to proceed under Clause b or c, a ball must be dropped in the bunker. The ball may be cleaned when lifted under this Rule.

How many of us have hit into an *unplayable lie* at one time or another in our lives? For some of us, maybe our lives *are, or were* an unplayable lie. Fear not! One fact that carries no doubt is “God doesn’t make any junk.”

In reference to the above rule, the most popular choice of most golfers is “c”. What the rule is saying is , if the player declares their ball unplayable, they can step back as far as they have to as long as they keep the object that made the shot unplayable between themselves and the hole. As a result, a one shot penalty is incurred.

For those of us who may be facing an unplayable lie in our lives, we have the option to step back as far as we need to, keep the reality of our lives in front of our eyes, and get ourselves to a point where we can clear that part of our lives and get to our target which is...Jesus Christ.

There will be penalties in life for our past behavior. However, if we’re playing the game like a winner, we will have to assume full responsibility for the penalties. We can’t go huffing about life with the “poor-me’s”, the “what-a, could-a, should-as”, because where we may be at the time is just one hole of our lives. God is faithful and...*This too shall pass* if we step back (as far as we have to), and turn it over to Him *with complete abandon of self*.

Using Every Club in the Bag

A friend was telling me that he recently heard touring professional Davis Love speak on the third round of this year's British Open saying that the weather was so bad, he had to use every club in the bag. I later heard this friend share of the life-changing experience he had as a result of making it down from the one hundred and fourth floor of The World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

During his sharing, he told of his enjoyment of gardening and how, if left unattended, a garden will be overcome by weeds. He likened it to his life and said that as 9-11 became more of a distant memory, he began getting sloppy with his spiritual life. Like the garden he said, our lives become overcome by weeds. In his book *Secrets of the Vine*, Bruce Wilkinson, who also wrote Prayer of Jabez, tells us to be careful about just looking for growth in our lives because we were called to bare fruit also. *Weeds grow* but produce no fruit. I think this is a perfect example of what my friend was talking about.

There are times when life will throw all the elements at us at once. For some of us, it may even be more than once and we will be forced to use every club in the bag. Every golfer has favorite clubs and can play in certain conditions better than others. However, when forced to use every club in the bag, they had better humble themselves enough to give up power and control, and have built their game on solid fundamentals.

It's no different in life. How many of us lose our sense of humility when life is dealing us kings and queens? As we move forward in the Christian life, how many of us move away from the fundamentals of God's precious grace and get consumed in the intellectual arrogance of growth? Remember, we're all just a day away from a backslide!

Whether it's life or golf we need to *Keep it simple* and master the fundamentals through daily practice. Too many of us golfers spend top dollar on golf clubs these days and then we end up with very stylish tomato gardens with the clubs we never learned to use. Likewise, far too many of us spend top dollar on feel-goods that create a buffer around life. Unfortunately, all the money in the world cannot buy a warning of when life is going to hit with all its elements and force us to use every club in the bag.

Hitting From the Inside Out

The correct swing path the golf club needs to travel to hit the ball straight is from the inside-out of the circle the correct golf swing should form. Unfortunately, ninety percent of golfers hit a golf ball from an outside-in swing path. When I say ninety-percent it could be more like ninety-nine percent of golfers that hit from the outside-in or “over-the-top” as it is also referred to. Let’s look at why this is.

For illustrative purposes we will use the example of a right-handed golfer. In order to produce an inside-out swing pattern, the move from the top of the backswing starts with a lateral move of the left knee. This takes much practice, patience, and trust especially with the long irons and the woods. The shorter the club and the more loft it has, the more the rule of *margin for error* allows for a less than perfect swing to produce a reasonable shot. That’s why we hit those clubs better. Problem is when it comes to our quest for power and control in hitting the long clubs, we get anxious at the top of the backswing and our hands take over rather than allowing our lower body to initiate the downswing.

Isn’t this the same way we play life? The little things take less concentration and require less than perfect practice, patience, and trust. But when it comes to the bigger things, we get anxious and our hands take over by our doing and taking control instead of leading with a bended knee and trusting that move.

When we take over in life we also produce an outside-in motion. How many of us say that when we get our outer lives in order then we’ll have the time to get our inner lives in order? It’s much harder to do with-in when we’re with-out and just wait on the Lord. It takes practice, patience, and trust to rely on that inside-out reflex response in our everyday lives.

The textbook drill for this swing fault is to have the golfer actually step to the back of the golf ball with their front foot using the same motion a baseball batter would hit a pitch with. This teaches the golfer to trust the lower body that it will give them their power. The textbook drill from the Book of Life comes from Isaiah 36: 3b & 4a (NIV): *Steady the knees that give way, say to those fearful hearts – be strong and do not fear; my God is always in control.* This will give us a drill for life. I was once told that the sure fire way to cure knocking knees is to kneel on them.

Both in life as in golf we can only consistently hit our target if we come from the inside out and our knees are the key with both. Start today by building your life from the inside out through the word of God, reaching out in areas that build true humility, and strong accountability relationships so that your heart will become a Bethlehem for the Son of God. Remember, it’s in the burnin’ that comes the learnin’!

Playing In Scrambles

Playing in Scrambles has become a popular way to bring people of all skill levels together on the golf course while allowing them to make a significant contribution for their foursome. When playing a scramble, each player hits a tee shot, and the best tee shot (and that is not necessarily the furthest) is selected. Then all players hit from that spot and continue the format until the hole is completed. There is one score for the hole. The scramble format was designed to make everyone equal on the course. This format can however be used inappropriately.

Unfortunately the fun can get taken out of a scramble when teams begin stacking the deck by placing all ringers in their foursomes, and this has lead to the demise of some outings. This format was designed to use the abilities of each of the players and level the playing field. As long as those with lesser skill levels try as hard as they can, they are at the top of their game in God's eyes.

I've played in many a scramble with an occasional golfer who has a feel around and on the greens that I only wish I had, and the key word here is "feel". You see, no matter how much a golfer practices, the feel that's needed for playing the game from a hundred yards and in is in large part "God-given".

Even more tragic, the body of Christ seems to have taken God's rules and begun stacking the decks. God sent His Son to even the playing field of life so that everyone in His family would play the game here as one. He gave everyone different skill levels to be used for His glory, and if used for His glory, all are equally as important in His eyes.

Unfortunately, the fun can be taken out of being part of the body of Christ. It too can become competitive when churches stack their boards with the most successful people they can get. Finally, let's not leave out those that are in every study and have become self-proclaimed authorities in Christianity who live to display their knowledge even if no one asks for it.

There are many of the so-called lesser important people in our churches today that have a feel for the hearts of God's people that many of us only wish we had, and the key word here is "feel". You see, no matter how many degrees we get or millions we make, the feel that's needed for touching the hearts of God's people is given to those who He views as successful because it is for His purpose.

Even though it's a group effort, when playing in a scramble a golfer still must keep much attention on their own game in order to make the team successful. In the body of Christ we need to begin doing the same thing by realizing that God loves us all equally and that if we are going to be an M.V.P. down here for Him we need to keep the focus on ourselves by paying attention to our own lives so that we can make a significant contribution to His team here on earth.

Can You Pick Up The Pace?

We all know the setting. We're out on the course to relax (what a ridiculous thought) when from a distance we see what looks like a scene from the old TV show, "The Rat Patrol." Some retired man looking to play free golf gets a job as a ranger which he takes more serious than some C.E.O.'s takes their jobs. Once their in my sight, any relaxation I'm feeling puts me into the attack mode as my blood pressure begins to rise. Then as he approaches the cart slows down and he makes the announcement, "Can you pick up the pace?" Its bad enough he's paid to irritate an entire golf course just for the sake of the bottom line, but also many times they have an attitude towards the golfer after they've paid an exorbitant fee to go out and get aggravated which makes that bottom line possible. Most of us could have stayed at work, or stayed home and been aggravated by--oops, better not go there.

A couple of years ago I was playing in an outing with three buddies. On the first tee we were handed a Palm Pilot. The Palm Pilot was set at the precise time the first tee shot was hit. Its intention was to let us know precisely where we should be on the golf course at any given time. Problem was, the Palm Pilot didn't take into consideration there might be other players on the course.

Then, we're sitting in our carts waiting to hit our approach shots to the ninth green as the group ahead of us finished putting out, when over the hill to our left he came. He got out of his cart, took a deep breath, his chest expanded three times its normal size and said in a deep voice, "Who has the Palm Pilot?" My first inclination was to reach into the cart then put the darn thing on a tee and really let the "big dog eat". Instead, I surrendered it over to the authorities. He opened the flap, widened his stance, flexed his knees, and made the announcement, "Can you pick up the pace?" I really thought I was losing it and I replied, (very respectfully, I must add), "There's a group on the green." To that he said, "Get moving and don't be a wise guy" as he drove off to irritate another golfer out for a relaxing round of golf.

Our life's opponent Old Slick has his own "Rat Patrol" deceiving us into why we need to "pick up the pace" of life today and we're biting hook, line, and sinker. The real crime in the fast pace of play demanded on most golf courses today is that it's almost impossible to play well and fair and we have to settle for "good enough," taking away the integrity out of the game. Old Slick is doing the same thing to us in life today with our relativistic thinking and compromised morality as we have come to live on "gimmies" cleverly disguised as "entitlements."

There has been an emergence of a new kind of personality: A "saturated self" and its opposite, the "empty saturated self" which makes up the core of our insane pace today. If not, then why with all that we purchase and acquire today, does it seem like there's never enough? All this while the research by the Federal Reserve indicates that household debt is at a record high in relation to disposable income. The analysts have come to realize that this unprecedented level of debt is posing a serious risk to the financial health of American households, yet advertisers continue their legal pushing of 5 minute fixes. At a recent conference of heads of companies from small to large, the results of a survey conducted were staggering. What was it these people wanted more than anything else? Inner peace!

Can You Pick Up The Pace? - Part II

We've all heard the expression but hopefully don't subscribe to its suggestion that "It's a war out there!" Yet a couple of weeks ago on a beautiful, frigid, Friday morning, I observed two business men driving expensive cars, both talking on the phone, and both contributing equally to the rush hour traffic jam they were in. Even though they were so involved with their phone conversations, they were still talented enough to free up a finger and gesture to the other that he was "#1" in his book, if you get my drift.

What class! I couldn't help but thinking back to 9-11 and wondering how many people may have been in a similar situation and a traffic jam saved their life. I thought to myself, gaining a few extra minutes would have been devastating yet losing a few was life-saving. Do you think maybe they've signaled to someone on the road since then that they are #1? How quickly we all forget what really counts, because whether it's on the golf course or life in general, America remains a spoiled nation addicted to speed only now we've moved from its ingestion to the action of it. Yet we continue to look for ways to fit more and more into our lives. How many of us today are rationalizing that the economy is the reason we don't have enough, while the majority of us in this land of plenty could be living in homes half the sizes and still have more than the majority of the world. When you think about it, maybe it's NOT the economy, stupid! Just maybe we're just too stupidly deceived to realize it's all in our quest to completely fill that God-shaped vacuum in our lives.

Our opponent as we play the game of life, Old Slick, has a job. He began that job back in the garden by deceiving us into moving our dependence on God to the things of this world. And like any good pusher, if he does his job properly, he can get us to need more and more of what we are dependent on which eventually totally distorts our view of reality and eventually moves us to over-indulgence into the things of this world. This society we live in today has filled it to the brim. The proof of this was in the incident that occurred last week at the Super Bowl. We've all watched the clips over and over, but what was mind-blowing was how most of the advertising execs interviewed coming from Gen-X and thereafter truly believes that today you have to "push the envelope", and then weigh the potential fine or penalty against the potential bottom line gain. This has become the distorted reality in our culture today.

In Part I of this Tip, I wrote that the pace of play on the golf course today is largely due to the bottom line but if you investigate, Old Slick is doing such a deceptive job as he riddles us deeper and deeper into our worldly dependencies that we expertly and articulately rationalize why we're not doing anything wrong. There's a book out entitled, [The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead](#). Basically it says whether it's in law, medicine, or the corporate world, "The American culture - with its classless mythology and frontier ethos - has proved uniquely hospitable to the seductive market ideas about the power of individuals to shape their own economic destiny." It made me think about Martin Luther's quote from [The Bondage of the Will](#) where Luther uses the expression, "Mistress Reason is the Devil's whore."

How To Eliminate 50% Of The Course & Life

Most of us who play golf are probably familiar with the 18th hole at Doral's Blue Monster in Miami, Florida. Many a player have found a watery grave either off the tee or on their approach shot as the huge water mass that links the left side of the fairway right up to the green puts a paralyzing fear in them.

Before Lee Trevino went on tour we're told he hooked the ball viciously. If you observe his strong grip and flat swing to this day, you could understand why. Then he made what would be some drastic swing adjustments: 1) He opened himself up and began lining up well left of his target. 2) On the top of the backswing he dropped the club in the slot basically looping it as if he were throwing an underhand pitch. 3) These two moves combined with a tremendous leg drive, and with the precise identification of the bottom of his swing, produced a major tournament ball flight. These critical swing adjustments allowed Lee to eliminate the left side of every golf course he played which, in theory, would decrease his margin of error by 50%.

I remember watching Lee tee off the 18th tee at Doral and saying to the gallery as he was swinging, "Ain't no way this ball is going in that water." As he started the ball over the left corner of the water and shaped it right, it landed center-cut as if he were controlling it by remote. Lee was able to do this because he had taken the time to completely "transform" his swing in a way that would allow him to compete.

In life today there are people, places, and things that have our numbers and due to our pace of living we attempt to microwave ourselves into shape through information rather than taking the time to transform ourselves. Just think how ridiculous it would have been if Trevino learned precisely why he hooked the ball and then tried to guard against it every time there was trouble to the left. Yet, that's exactly what we do in life. We either go to a counselor or read a book and then when the particular pressures that have our number in life hit, we're supposed to stop, think, and then apply what we've been taught. Right!

In golf when we hit a shot right-to-left or left-to-right intentionally, it is said that we "shaped" the shot. In life, if we are living out our created purpose, we must dissect ourselves and take a close look at our **S-piritual Gifts**, and then we begin finding the "bottom" of our lives by taking a fearless and searching look into our **H-earts**. Now only by God's saving grace do we begin to separate trying to have it all as the world tells us and we accept our worldly limitations and turn them into Godly strengths realizing we were given certain **A-bilities** to glorify God with. What an awesome privilege!

As life rears its ugly head we will become aware of how our **P-ersonalities** react to certain situations which will lead us to an understanding of just how our life's **E-xperiences** can S.H.A.P.E. us into useful vessels for His eternal purpose. Naturally, eliminating those worldly tendencies that get us in trouble will decrease our margin for error, or sin, as it was once referred to.

Find Your Game

“Find Your Game!” A slogan made famous by the Taylor Made Golf Company upon introducing their “Burner Bubble” golf club line. Of course Taylor Made, like the other golf manufacturers, tries to convince us with their advertising that all we really have to do to “find our game” is buy their latest products. They even entice us with endorsements from top professionals. Problem with this approach is that more of these clubs find our basements or the trunks of our cars rather than actually bring our games to the next level. What they don’t tell us is the time and self-searching the top players spend in order to find their games.

“How unsearchable His judgments, and who has ever known the mind of the Lord?” the Bible asks us. The exact game that pulled yours truly away from God as a teenager brought me back in my mid-thirties only to find out I had no game left. It’s like that old proverb, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”

Not short on determination (or maybe its pride), I set out this past golf season to find my game and get ready to enter the senior ranks in three years at age fifty. That’s scary! Each round I played, I kept statistics instead of score in order that I could determine the parts of the game I needed to find. Here’s what I found out:

Average fairways hit per round were 5.5. Greens hit in regulation were 10.4 of which my conversion rate of the missed greens was a poor 3.1 and I averaged an abominable 34.6 putts per round. Aside from my hands turning to stone, what does all this mean? Bluntly, if I don’t get better shaping my tee shots and develop a marksman like approach from a hundred yards and in, I can forget about ever finding my game again. Most importantly, being the over-achiever that I am, I need accountability that reminds me that if I conquer the world, I may lose my life in the process.

So, I used my tenth club for playing the game of life and I began taking an inventory of my life along with my golf game, and here’s what I discovered: To live a 168- hour weekly prioritized lifestyle, I would need to spend 16.8 hours in communion with my God, 49.0 hours sleeping, 8.0 hours of exercise, 16.8 hours with my wife and children, 16.8 hours of personal time, still leaving me with 60.4 hours every week to work, work, work. What I discovered is not that I don’t have time, which is a symptom of our area, but I’m sloppy with the time I have and it’s much easier anticipating life than being an active participate in it.

Find Your Game and the Truth Will Set You Free!

Charlie Stetson

Some years back when the Senior P.G.A. Tour was in its infancy, a highlight of the year was the Legends of Golf Tournament. The field was packed with the likes of Sam Snead, Julius Boros, Roberto DeVicenzo, Don January, and how can I ever leave out “Terrible” Tommy Bolt. It was electrifying to see this natural talent as these legends displayed the same energy and enthusiasm they did in their twenties. Watching those self-taught caddie swings, an art the golf world will never be blessed with again was just amazing. There was never a doubt that the talent on display came from a Power greater than themselves, and coming from the old school, these legends would usually give the “Good Lord” the credit with a reverence which has also become a lost art today. For these guys, it wasn’t about the money, it was about the joy the game brought them, and the thrill it gave the crowds.

Upon returning home from vacation last Saturday, when checking my e-mail I discovered that a man who became a dear friend and who was without a doubt a legend in the Christian Community went home to be with the Good Lord at age 82. If you never met Charlie Stetson, you missed out on an experience of solid values, a self taught career, an old fashioned reverence for God and an enthusiasm that without a doubt would have tired out most twenty year olds today. During our many lunches together, he would talk with incurable enthusiasm of the many “initiatives” with which he was involved. Charlie couldn’t help people fast enough. He grooved a life of service as naturally as the golfing legends grooved their swings. I’ll always treasure our last Christmas lunch together. I asked Charlie if he would be going home to catch a football game or maybe just relax since it was a Saturday afternoon. He eagerly replied, “No time for that, there’s too much going on.”

There are certain things I’ll miss about Charlie, such as getting a phone call from him and hearing on the other end that hearty “Hello Bill, this is Charlie Stetson.” But most importantly, there are the memories I will treasure until we have our next lunch together. Like the old pros, Charlie gave away his wisdom with pride, and if you were willing to listen, you would get a lesson from that wisdom that was unmatched by modern techniques. He was selfless and lived with a definite purpose. I think if we were to continue to keep this legend’s spirit alive, it would be to work tirelessly and selflessly in bringing the Body of Christ together as One.

While we will never fully understand God’s plan for our lives, last week He said to Charlie, “It is finished, good and faithful servant.” I pray that when my final starting time is called, it will be with the same message, and I pray that you too will “*find your game*” in this life and help others find theirs also through the “Good News” of Jesus Christ.

We’ll miss you Charlie! But rest in peace, we’re continuing the good fight and we know you’re with us!

David Bloom

A few years ago, David Bloom made his way to a men's group in the area. It wasn't too long after that he became "one of the guys." While just getting to know him, everything being said on the news reports certainly sounded accurate. David had real sincere eyes and a smile you knew was genuine. If you placed a call to him, he even called you back.

The last time we saw him was just before he left for the Gulf and it was a special time because David shared a reading from Oswald Chambers "My Utmost for His Highest." It was the January 15th reading entitled "Do You Walk in White?" Before he began reading he said, "I may have trouble getting through this one." It was common to see him wiping his eyes while standing with the guys and singing hymns.

While concluding the reading he read the words, *"Have you had your white funeral, or are you piously deceiving your own soul? Has there been a point in your life which you now mark as your last day?"* Yesterday was by no means David's last day. He had that some time back. Yesterday David went on his most exciting assignment yet, he went home and saw his brother Jesus face-to-face. I'll bet when he asked his Lord his first question, he just couldn't stop himself from saying, "And I have a follow up to that question, Lord."

To Melanie and the girls, my heart is broken for you, having lost a brother at a young age. It's knowing I'll see him again someday for eternity that keeps me walking with one foot in front of the other. My prayer is that you too "walk in white" and feel the comfort of David's arms through the comfort of the Lord of the universe who gave His life for us all that we might live.

I guess the next time we see him we'll hear him say, "This is David Bloom NBC News reporting from Paradise."

We'll miss you brother but we'll see you again!

Dennie Welsh

“Dennie Welsh WAS the REAL HEIR APPARENT to Lou Gerstner. Unfortunately he became incapacitated due to illness and was forced to retire. Lou thought very highly of him and thought he was actually a very good businessman *although he was much more ethical than most IBM executives.*” ***Wall Street Journal***

“Although he was much more ethical than most IBM executives.” If you were blessed to know Dennie, you would understand that statement. “God is good!” He would tell me that in our weekly email exchanges during the last several years as he battled a brutal terminal illness. On January 1st he closed his biggest and most important payday as he met his Maker whom he adored face-to-face. Dennie, without a doubt, stored many treasures in heaven during his earthly life.

Those that didn’t really know Dennie say he was a self-made man starting at an entry level at IBM and retiring in line to be its next chairman. I knew Dennie, and the fact was he achieved what he did because he was self-abandoned and did everything for the glory of his buddy Jesus.

I first met Dennie in 1991 and as time went on started to see he really liked me which I found peculiar since there was nothing I could offer him. You see, I had many experiences during my professional golf career teaching other high-level guys and was even a personal golf instructor to the chairman of a fortune 500 company. While working at their clubs I was their friend because I had something they wanted but as soon as I left, they would no longer take my calls. Being a simple-minded guy, it became very clear to me that what was between myself and these other guys was a skill that could be replaced in a second, but between Dennie and me was the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

As I fight the daily battle of this ministry I try to feel his determination and his Jack Nicklaus like focus along with the stare of Raymond Floyd which were like lasers. I thought of Dennie regularly while he was ill as I dwelled in my own self-pity thinking at times that he would trade places with me in a heartbeat and just knock the challenge of the ministry out of the park. He never had to tell me how he felt in his emails because I could determine that by their appearance and length, but he never left out, “God is good!”

Let me close with the words of Brother Lawrence which I feel summed up Dennie’s life. “*We ought to give ourselves up to God, with regard to things both “worldly and spiritual” and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling of His will, whether He lead us by suffering or by comfort, for both would be equal to a soul truly resigned.*”

While I miss you already, I’m so happy for you that you are finally feeling better and full of God’s abundant grace which you so freely shared. Your life was a true testimony, pal.

“Yes-Sir-Ree” God is good!

Glenn Williams

*“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” **Matthew 20:16***

What a fitting verse when I think of Glenn’s life. You see there was a running joke behind this. In all the *G.O.L.F.* outings, Glenn and two other brothers would pick up their cross and take their pastor Derek Calhoun to round out their foursome. Derek a very occasional golfer who thankfully never considered giving up his day job which he is extremely gifted in for the game of golf, would be quite a heavy load for his three brothers. As a result, their foursome pretty much each year finished last and claimed *G.O.L.F.*’s coveted *Empty Chair Award*.

At first the group would humbly and somewhat hunched over come to the front of the room and accept their prize which usually came in the form of tennis rackets or starter knitting kits. Then Glenn got smart and just let Derek come forward and accept for the group. What I loved about these brothers was their sense of humor and the smiles on their faces as they would laugh from the pit of their stomachs.

But where it counted most, Derek some years back claimed an empty chair in the Kingdom and Glenn’s name was inscribed in that chair. Derek would then take Glenn and many other men under his tutelage and truly make them real winners at the Game of Life. Whenever I was around these guys, God’s grace was overpowering, and what was most miraculous for me occurred at a men’s breakfast at their church some years ago when yours truly had a chilling experience. While watching their men’s choir perform, I experienced myself lose my sense of color, and even now I get the chills looking back on the experience. I choked up from being so overwhelmingly happy that I became color-blinded at that breakfast.

Glenn’s contribution to the Christian community in our area was truly one of humility and gratitude. When Derek called me and gave me the news of Glenn’s going home and filling that empty chair in the Kingdom, though sad I couldn’t help think back on the smiles and the gut wrenching laughs realizing that was really what *Life* was all about. It was a very natural reaction for me to tell Derek, “*I love you brother*” as he returned the gesture, and then we hung up.

Prior to Payne Stewart’s untimely death, he was remembered on The Golf Channel saying, “*Golf is not the most important thing in my life anymore.*” Derek, and I mean this sincerely, Praise God it’s not yours, because you and Glenn finished first in the most important outing, the one we all play in our daily lives at the Country Club of *Life*.

*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. **1 John 3:14***

Glenn, we miss you brother, but thanks to that love that just won’t quit, that amazing grace, you live on in us all.

The Basics Grip, Stance, Setup...And Jesus

We've all heard the saying that "*knowledge is power*" However I wonder if that saying is really accurate. When studying the likes of Hogan, Nicklaus, and now Woods, you learn how they worked to master the basics with an intense precision. Nicklaus is quoted in his book *Golf My Way* saying that 40% of mis-hit shots occur before the golfer swings the club an inch. That should give you a real indication of the importance of the basics of the game.

Speaking from personal experience and having read about players like Nick Faldo and Bobby Clampett, knowledge at times is anything but power and I think that especially holds true in life today. Would you say we've gotten away from the basics of life these days - a solid *grip* on the word of God, a firm *stance* on the difference between basic right and wrong, a life *setup* of God, spouse, children, and work?

When we look at the basics of the golf swing starting with the *grip*, there may be differing opinions regarding the long term success of a strong versus weak grip when compared to the textbook suggested *grip*, but there is absolutely no debate that the key to the grip is that both palms face each other so the hands can work in "unity." Knowledge and our demanding attitude of entitlement for information today certainly has contributed greatly to the lack of basic unity and we've replaced it with self-entitled instant gratification that is now at epidemic levels in America today.

Our *stance* in life is off target today. Being an unsophisticated guy, I just can't understand how the same attitudes that fights fiercely for the right to abort a human life, fights just as fiercely to save the life of a tree. And now, politicians are refusing to receive the Body of Christ in a show of unity for a woman's right to choose. These politicians might be great spin-meisters but when they stand in front of their Creator, they will find their freedom of earthly choice has caused them the right to life eternally. What a deceptive shot to gamble on!

The setup, now that's the key. As an instructor, I can't begin to tell you how many people I've taught over the years whose grips have been fairly good, their feet were lined up squarely, but their hips and/or their shoulders were wide open setting them up for the most common ball flight in the game... the slice. If we're honest, most of us need work on our setup in life don't we? Oh, we have a very articulate grip on God's word, and our stances in life are in line with most of the real mortal sins, but how many of us have our setup really in check? In Jack's book Golf My Way, Jack also says that golf is played from the ground up as he stresses the importance of balance. Is your life really in balance between God, spouse, children, and work or are one or more of these out of line causing mis-hits in life while you're living with the attitude that you're doing everything you can?

The reason an accountability partner is so critical is the fact that we can't see our setup in full without another pair of eyes. It's the way God made us! We need to face the fear that we've covered up with articulate arrogance, then get a caddie to help us carry our baggage in life, and return to the basics that God intended us to live by and let Him be God in full.

Over the Memorial Day weekend there was some real overdue recognition of the World War II Veterans as their new memorial was dedicated in Washington. The vets who were interviewed all seemed to display 4 qualities that we are seeing less and less of today, *Gratitude, Humility, Acceptance, and they were rather "Unsophisticated" by today's standards.* Be careful! Growing up in an unsophisticated and basic Italian culture many people looked down at those who were "unsophisticated", but I guarantee you, we are usually 10 steps ahead of where today's sophisticated society thinks we are.

Tear Down These Walls! (A Tribute to Ronald Reagan)

Ronald Wilson Reagan was sworn in as the 40th President of the United States on January 20, 1981. Reagan told the nation, *"It's time America rediscovers its values and common sense."* He told us, *"Government is not the answer today...It's the problem."* President Reagan also felt in his heart deeply and, as the great communicator, told us, *"Without God democracy cannot and will not endure."*

However, one of the lessons we all need to take from President Reagan came from his continual preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When necessary, he was able to use passionate and heartfelt words that confirmed to a nation that his sincerity and commitment to truth.

Lightning Doesn't Yell "Fore", Me Lad!

As I think back to my caddie days, I can recall very vividly numerous Saturdays and Sundays when the weather was so stormy that the course would have to be closed. Without fail, before the big announcement by the greens superintendent the weekend regulars would be gathered on the terrace at the club saying, "I see clearing over there!" Poor guy! It seemed every time that statement was made, the rain came down harder and the skies got darker. If you're a golfing die-hard, you know the scene only too well.

I'm afraid the saying "It never rains on a golf course" has been taken too literally and we've even carried the attitude over to our daily lives. Some of you may remember when Lee Trevino was struck by lightning, he was asked what he would do the next time he was on the golf course and saw lightning. Lee said, "I'm going to pull out my 1 iron, hold it straight up to the sky then run for cover because even God can't hit a 1 iron. "The problem is, whether it's in golf or life, when we can see the lightning it's already too late. I found a story that I don't even know if it's true but it plays here. It was said that while caddying one day, an old Scottish caddie heard ever so vaguely the sound of thunder from the distance and immediately began walking to shelter. The man he was caddying for asked him where he was going. The caddie replied, "Lightning doesn't yell Fore, me lad!"

Oswald Chambers writes about having our "white funerals" and "coming to the end of ourselves." Are you going through life with a bullet-proof attitude that makes you see the clearing even when everyone else around you sees the storm in your life getting darker and more intense? For example, the National Lightning Safety Institute, (NSLI) has a very simple rule for lightning on the course, "If you can see it...flee it!" For those of you who need a more sophisticated approach, "Every 5 seconds you count in between strikes represents a mile — So, if you count to 35 seconds or less the lightning is seven miles away...Get to shelter because you're running out of time!"

The same theory holds true in life. If something is pointed out by a person who cares for you, take heed to their advice. If something is pointed out by two people who care for you, start counting. Caution, when something is pointed out by three or more people who care for you... get to the nearest shelter with your accountability partner, pastor, coach, or whoever(just not your spouse because they are just that your spouse; not someone you are to be accountable with). You are running out of time with what matters most in life because you're the only one who can still see the clearing.

Remember here at G.O.L.F. "Fore" stands for Fellowship Offers Refuge & Encouragement.

Seeking Shelter on the Course and in Life

Several months back a very dear friend was married in the midst of a heavy snow storm. It was your typical scene of the men scurrying the women into the church and then the cleaning off of the cars at the conclusion of the festivities. Prior to the start of the service, another friend sitting in front of my wife and I said, "I'll bet there's a tip in this day". Well the Holy Spirit took it's time turning my light on for this one but now it seems like it's time to give it a try.

It made me think back to a rain delay years back which occurred during the first round of the Westchester Classic. I ran to a shelter to find Gardner Dickinson and Tom Weiskopf sitting there. For the entire delay they talked about fishing and how important it was to have time away from the game and the peace they found from the sport of fishing.

Then it occurred to me that in golf when a player finds themselves a bit in a slump, they many times step back and find solitude in fishing. However, in our daily lives we have become so outcome controlling that when we find ourselves slumping (you know those times when everything we touch seems to turn to mud), we seem to stay in the game at an even greater pace only to find those are the times one deal after the next goes down.

So, when the going gets tough... the tough go fishing! The fish we seek are found wherever God's purpose for us is at the time. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33. Where is that purpose at any given time? Only the Holy Spirit can lead you there. However there is one thing that is for sure. God's purpose will never be found in our own heads as we try desperately to control the outcomes of our lives that we arrogantly think God will benefit from also.

So, the next time you get caught in one of life's storms...

1. Get under God's umbrella of peace with your caddie in life. Don't do it alone!
2. Seek shelter (go after his lost fish, in other words for this tip's sake, the sheep that swim) outside yourself and your situation. The way you can't stop a storm on the course you can't stop a storm in life either. Old Slick just deceives us into thinking we're in control.

Therefore, let God be God!

The Christian Life, Like Golf, Is a Game of Opposites

Golf has been described as a game of opposites much to the confusion of many who play the game. I can't count the number of times I've been playing with someone over the years and after grounding a shot they say, "I didn't get under that one." In general, to make a golf ball go up the player needs to hit down. Forget about trying to "scoop it!" To make the ball turn left you aim right and vice versa. Maybe that's why it's called a crazy game at times.

Then I was thinking how the Christian life like the game of golf is about opposites. Jesus was born to bring death to the "law" as it was known. Then He died so that we would have life. So for our lives to begin looking up, we have to begin by looking down; down into the darkness of our hearts and come to a saving truth about who we were before our old selves died. This is accomplished as the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts into a Bethlehem for the Son of God as He is born in us and gives us the precious give of eternal life.

When teaching a person how to hit down on the ball, most begin by digging the club into the ground causing what's called a "chunky" or "fat" shot. This leaves them feeling disgusted and thinking they're going backwards. As a result, many times, they retreat back to their old ways. Our old ways are the easy and comfortable ways and unfortunately if we retreat back to them we really never improve much. Like in life where we bounce from church to church or counselor to counselor looking for the quick fix, in golf we keep buying the latest clubs and bounce from instructor to instructor. Then Old Slick enters in and the destruction starts as we put down the church, counselor, or the instructor.

In the Christian life we may also find ourselves getting a bit disgusted at times. This may especially happen when we begin digging down into our hearts because we may feel our lives are all of a sudden getting worse then when we were trying to scoop up some of life's mis-hits with our "that don't count" attitude of denial that so many of us carry over to the course when we need to forget about a bad shot. Don't forget what Chi Chi said, "For Most Amateurs, Their Favorite 'Wood' In the Bag Is the Pencil".

The Bible tells us to put aside the old life and not to look for the easy way. It's by regressing at times in both life and golf that we can get to the next level in both. Unfortunately too few of us really want to take the chance to get to a true Christ-like life.

Dying...He gave us life
Beaten...Yet He could not be killed
Sorrowful...Yet we are always rejoicing
Poor...Yet we were made rich
Had nothing...Yet we possess everything

Thank You Jesus!

"For Most Amateurs, Their Favorite 'Wood' in the Bag is the Pencil"

The title of this week's tip comes from none other than Chi Chi Rodriguez. Anyone familiar with Chi Chi knows the fun he has with the game of golf and of the tremendous attitude by which he plays the game. Chi Chi makes it very clear just how much he appreciates everything God has given him as a result of the poor upbringing he had. He has displayed throughout his career a sincere humility along with a heart for outreach the likes of which are unmatched. Chi Chi has never moved from playing the game of life from the solid basics of humility, respect, and gratitude he learned as a child, a child who some in our country would look at as having come from nothing. These basics on the other hand are what some in our culture could use a long refresher course on.

In life today, there is a faction in our country that has moved from the basics that Chi Chi displays to the "Everybody Does It" attitude of entitlement to life. Our opponent at the game of life, Satan, is approaching us all today much like the golf hustlers I grew up around. When challenged these hustlers would use the expression, "Bring Your Pencil" meaning the only way their opponent would be able to beat them would be by some real creative cheating. When you come right down to it, Satan is scoring big-time today in our cheating culture. Every day we turn on the news to hear the reports of the latest celebrity and sport star criminal trials, along with the CEO, CFO, or COO, that is on trial for their grandiose lifestyles. And then we have to listen to their high-paid attorneys basically lying about their clients as if we are all a bunch of listeners born yesterday. Let's not even go near the absolute nonsense being thrown around by the challenger in this year's presidential election along with his team of pencil pushers.

But thank God you can't teach an old dog new spin. On Friday the world got to watch Arnold Palmer as he played in his 50th and what would be his final Masters. Arnie proudly and humbly walked hole-by-hole with his 16 year-old grandson on his bag as the crowds applauded and yelled out their "thanks" for what Arnie gave them over the years. This wasn't about tournaments won; it was about what he projected. Arnie without a doubt is another example of someone who played life straight down the middle... No Pencil Needed and No Spin Required. This is why the principles of the game of golf are such a great lesson in life. Get away from the basics from which the game evolved and you may as well pick up the ball, put it in your pocket, and go buy a tennis racket.

As we continue to watch and listen to the news about today's heros, we can still get the blessing to watch the likes of Chi Chi and Arnie enjoying in peace and contentment the life those on the left side of the fairway are pushing the pencil to try and find. They are enmeshed in their court battles, numerous dysfunctional relationships striving to discover happiness, mounting barrage of angry protests, or they mock those who live by old fashioned basics as if we are naïve and a threat to the immoral relativistic self absorbed lifestyles they are promoting. Let's all pray that someday just maybe they'll get it. Gee, I wonder if it's a coincidence that the majority of out-of-bounds markers are found on the "left" side of the course?

We All Play the Same Game on a Different Course

I've referred to the movie *City Slickers* before about how three men went out to find the true meaning of life. During the movie, Billy Crystal is riding along with "Curley" played by Jack Palance and Crystal asks for an explanation of what life is all about. Then Curley with his gritty groan holds up one finger and says to Crystal, "It's all about one thing." Crystal confused continues to ask Curley at various times what that "one" thing is, and Curley tells him basically if he looks inside himself deeply enough, he'll find it.

As men, we all play the same game of life on a different course. Oh we have the white collar worker who leverages while the blue collar worker gets into debt. Then there's the white collar worker who has an *affair* while the blue collar guy *cheats*, and the one that I like the most is the white collar guy who *overindulges on alcohol* while the blue collar guy just *plain drinks too much*.

Fact is no matter how we spin it, whether it's the CEO or the factory worker, when life hits we all feel its impact in one way or another. Sure we may react to it differently, but for the most part whether it's pain, fear, illness, our children, our spouses, or death of those close to us, we all experience that same pit in our stomachs at times. Unfortunately we as men were groomed to protect, to solve, and try to make a bad situation better. Surrender? Ah, not for a real man.

I heard a statement recently that went something like: Until we understand eternity and really accept it, we will never have daily enjoyment. Jesus Christ is that 'one thing.' It matters none to God if we play at an exclusive club or the cow pasture where Sam Snead learned the game. It's all about one thing! Have you truly found Him yet?

For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son that whoever believes in Him will never die but have eternal life (John 3:16).

"Bring Your Game!"

Another old caddie saying used when the pressure was on was "bring your game" meaning, now's the chance to prove what you're made of. Would you choke or would you come out a winner? Most of the time success came from hitting the sure shot, meaning a shot that came natural to the player and many times it carried an uncommon swing thought that worked for that player.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the dessert, Jesus brought His "A" game. When you come right down to it, Old Slick tried to hustle Jesus but instead he found Jesus confident as He yielded verses of Scripture back to Satan to counter his every challenge.

Before a professional golfer begins their round, their caddie goes out and marks off the course in their playbook. What are you playing the day with today? Do you carry some favorite Scripture verses/swing thoughts for when Satan dangles temptation in front of you to see if you've brought your game? Do you touch base with your accountability partner daily even if you're on top of the world? Remember, one-on-one we are no match for Satan's crafty ways. In what areas of your life is he getting free rent in your head? Remember, a good hustler tries to get in his opponents head, and Old Slick is the best.

What Do Your Habits Show Others About Your Game?

Teaching legend Harvey Penick was quoted saying something to the effect, "If you play a guy with a bad grip and a nice swing, don't worry. On the other hand, if you play a guy with a bad grip and a bad swing, be careful! He's made adjustments in his game and he knows what he's doing."

How does the way you grip life coincide with your walk? How does the way you grip life look to those around you? If you're having struggles, have you made an adjustment such as surrendering the struggles? Honestly? If there are still secrets you hold, have you come clean with your caddie in life? One pastor told me that one of the leading sins today is intellectual arrogance. We think that because we can use articulate spin about our lives and make it sound real good to ourselves then we must be just fine. However those we're around have us "picked off cold".

A golf veteran has just about seen it all. They have tricks of the trade that some of their opponents don't even know exist. They have a wisdom for the game that has come from their determination and willingness to give it that little extra and find out what works just for them through the unique physical design God gave only to them.

Life's veterans on the other hand are no different. They too have a courageous determination and willingness to give life that little extra. They're willing to pay a price, not a monetary price but an emotional price. In Christian lingo, they are willing to die to Christ. Like a golfer, they're willing to make adjustments to their game of life that may set them back for a while but then bring them to a whole new level.

The senior partner of the financial firm I worked with in New York City had a saying, "If you are willing to do what most will not, you will enjoy what most can not." Does your opponent in life, Old Slick, see the adjustments you've made in your game?

Following is a simple test to help you find that answer.

How would you categorize your life currently? (Circle your answer)

- a) An imitation**
- b) A transformation**
- c) A bit of both a & b**
- d) None of the above**

When it's Breezy...Swing it Easy

Well, another year is upon us and it's that time when we make resolutions. The most popular, of course, are weight loss and quitting smoking. Then there are those where we shoot for the sky: More money, increased sales quotas, a larger or second home, a fancier country club or car and so on.

We all know while there are no guarantees, one thing is for certain. Life hits us all at one time or another, and some even get more than their fair share. When the gusty winds of life swirl around us in the form of sickness, death, financial uncertainty, business failures, and strained relationships, that we tend to seize back control of life and even attempt to control the lives of others and solve the situation our way.

Yet, a famous tip of Bobby Jones was, "when you are hitting into the wind, accept your loss of distance and swing within yourself." Maintaining balance is most critical, but you know the way it goes. We grab the club a bit tighter, widen our stance a bit, and the "big dog is ready to eat".

In life we do the same thing, don't we? Oh, we talk about giving up control usually while we're playing with a winning hand. But when we come right down to it, we usually end up gripping life tighter, taking an immovable stance while holding our prideful ground, and the next thing we know our lives and the lives of those we're trying to control are out of balance. Then the chaos sets in.

On the course, trying to overpower the wind magnifies the curve of a slice or hook, and trying to overpower life magnifies and complicates things almost every time.

So, as we begin the New Year, get accountable, stay in the present, and play life one day at a time. Remember what Jesus said to the multitudes during the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not be anxious but seek first of all God's kingdom and His way of playing life and He will supply your needs and then some. And do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own" (Matthew 6)

So, swing it easy! We play golf one hole at a time and we play life one day at a time.

These Guys Are Good!

I believe it was the UBS Hong Kong Open, one of the final events on the 2006 European Tour's season, which Jim Furyk hit an errant tee shot and his playing partner Ian Poulter accidentally stepped on the ball while the group was looking for it. The rules official then determined that Furyk was entitled to a drop because the lie was unplayable. Furyk responded by saying that the decision wasn't fair because the lie was actually unplayable before Poulter stepped on the ball.

Earlier in the season at the 2006 British Open, David Toms was literally the only person in the world who saw his ball move while he was over a putt. The Royal and Ancient reviewed the occurrence from various angles numerous times via video tape and determined the ball didn't, in fact, move. Toms just didn't feel right about the decision and disqualified himself. Are these guys good or nuts, some might ask?

In a day when other professional athletes are denying using performance enhancing drugs in order to get the edge and shatter records, what is it that makes these golfers such a rare breed while some of these others are being embarrassed out of their sports and could even face federal prosecution? Imagine if we played the game of life the same way these professionals play the game of golf. What a great world it would be! When you really come down to it, isn't the way they conduct themselves on the course the exact way Christ wants us to conduct ourselves in life?

One of the first things a golfer must do on the course is to realize they are powerless over results. I heard Peter Jacobsen say that, "golf is all about managing your mistakes and knowing your limitations." One of the first things we need to do in life is to actually have a revulsion against ourselves and face our limitations, and surrender, surrender, surrender. Then do what the PGA Tour does so well: serve, serve, and serve those who can benefit from your life experience. Remember the following...

"Give something to those that will accept it. Give to them the experience, strength, and hope of your personal life experience as it has been given to you by the Grace of God through Jesus Christ. REMEMBER ALWAYS...the giving of advice can never take the place of the giving of self."

“The More I Practice The Luckier I Get”

This week's title is actually a quote made famous by golfing great Ben Hogan. It's said Hogan had a weekly practice session unlike any other of the professionals. He would drive up to the course, the trunk of his car would pop open, he would pull out two golf bags filled with numerous clubs, and he would precision practice for an entire day.

Why do you think the greats like Hogan, Palmer, Nicklaus, and Woods have all the luck? Why do these guys seem to make the dramatic shots right when they need to? Were they born under a lucky star while the rest were born under a dark cloud?

I grew up in Stamford, CT with Bobby Valentine. Sure he had a God-given gift and ability, but he went at his dream constantly. Why was it no surprise that Bobby always made the clutch hit or the crucial play? All these professionals did what the others in their sport didn't.

After being asked countless times over the years for his secret, Hogan answered, “The secret is in the dirt, and you've gotta dig it out.” You know, most of our greatness in life lies in the dirt of our life--in the secrets, the denial, the excuses and the poor-me's. Unfortunately for most of us it's much easier to stay where we're familiar and live life making excuses and blaming.

Fact is, if we spent as much time doing the things most won't, we would enjoy the things most can't. Instead many of us take the easy way out and plan our next pity party. Problem is, no one beats the system forever. There is always a price to pay, and the pure hell of it just might be looking back on your life when it's too late to do anything about it.

"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects the wind; the realist adjusts the sails."

-Anonymous

Time to Get Back to the Basics of Life

While watching The Golf Channel at the end of the 2006 season, I saw a wrap up of the year's USGA events. The segment ended by saying that the USGA was inundated with letters from angry parents blaming the USGA for poor course conditions during the season's Junior events which caused their kids to play badly. Oh my!

In the January 2007 issue of Golf Magazine, Hal Sutton was interviewed saying, "I don't agree with a lot that Johnny Miller says, (And who does? I honestly mute the TV during an NBC golf telecast) but I totally agree with his closing comments at the 2006 Ryder Cup when he said the state of American golf has never been where it is right now. We need to start Junior programs that are caring, loving, inviting, **and not controlling.**"

Here's a promise . . . In this world we will have bad lies on the course and in life, but fear not because God has conquered the course and the world. Parents had better realize learning to play the bad lies develop the greatest ball strikers. Making up excuses and fighting their battles will only develop more "prima Donnas" that the European golfers can make minced meat out of. Parents today need to stop playing God in their kid's lives and introduce the kids to God - giving Him the reins. Kids today need to know they are being misled and Sundays were not made for the NY Times. Can I get a Praise God?!

A few years back PGA Tour Commissioner, Tim Finchem, when being interviewed regarding the new tour said, and I paraphrase: With big money come big problems. Golf is not just another sports option to make our kids bonus babies so they can live the good life. During this year's Bob Hope tournament, host George Lopez said, "Everything a son can learn from a father I learned from the game of golf." With the amount of parent-less children we have today as a result of the over-achieving **high** many of us are on, golf and its principles just might be a kid's last shot for shaping their lives.

It's time to get back to the basics in life, let our kids be kids and stop shaping their lives around the things we didn't get that we feel we were and/or are entitled to. We are just passing through and it's time we realize this round of life is just a mini-tour event for the real life to come.

The Golf Ball Is Hit At 7 O'clock – What?

Without a doubt, the most valuable ball striking tip I received from Lee Trevino was that precision accuracy is a result of hitting the ball at 7 o'clock. Now, what does that mean?

Having been on and off the lesson tee for over 30 years now, I can tell you that when you ask a golfer which part of the ball they are looking at they will tell you “the top”. Yet, it's actually the lower back half of the ball that should be our target, and precisely 7 o'clock at that. Of course that would be 5 o'clock if you play from the left side.

This is without a doubt the move that separates a golfer from someone who plays golf. I heard Raymond Floyd say that he will narrow his focus down to a single dimple. That's precision!

We seem to be losing the need for precision in golf as well as in life because both are being made too easy for us. Technology has made hitting the ball a whole lot easier. Now we even have the birth of hybrids which has reinvented the long iron game. Technology has certainly put information at our finger tips 24/7 making many facets of life a whole lot easier. The result, convenience and instant gratification have become entitlements.

Many of us today can unfortunately be defined as hybrid Christians. We're committed to a degree when life is giving us the right bounces. But as soon as we get a bad break on the course of life and determine we've had enough, we begin flirting with the out of bounds lines as we interject some on-the-spot local rules rationalizing then eventually compromise the precision in our living. In other words, we “pick it up” and put our W.W.J.D. wrist band in our pocket (get my drift) and our scorecard for that chapter of life has a “WD” (withdrew) written on it.

It's our commitment to precision in life and golf that leads to victory in the majors of both. In life, precision living will help us discover the gift of finding “our purpose” and “what works for us” setting us up for the major victory in life. Then as we take the victory walk up the final fairway of this life The Lord can greet us by saying, “Well done my good and faithful servant!”

Remember the words of Bagger Vance, “Golf like life is a game that cannot be won, just played”

“Golf, like Life, Is A Game That Cannot Be Won - Just Played”

We’ve all heard the saying, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” If that is your attitude, then golf in your life will stand for **Going Out Lost Forever**. The Bible tells us, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet loses his life in the process."

We’re all called to show up for each daily round of life - **and play it**, play it focused and with integrity. You see, it’s the quality of our life that determines its real value, not whether we win or lose. In order for our lives to have real value, we must set the standard of a Hogan, Nicklaus, or Woods. The eventual champions in this life live lives of honesty, purity, selflessness, and love. Our lives ought to be judged by this standard in determining their real value to God and our fellow man. By this standard, most of the so-called winners really are not winners at all.

On the other side of the coin we’ve all said at one time or another, “No matter what I do, I just can’t seem to win.” Now you’re talking! Life is a game of opposites, just like golf. It’s in dying that we have life, and its in losing that we win the ultimate victory; that is of course if the “One” who is the “Life” runs our life and we have sincerely abandoned our life to Him.

The fact is if you are one of those who is always pressing and frustrated on the course due to focusing on score, score, score, I can guarantee you golf isn’t really worth playing. Just as in life, if you are one of those who are always keeping score of your entitlements, money, righting your wrongs and being held captive by a long resentful memory, life isn’t even worth living.

Our lives must have quality in order to make them worthwhile and purposeful. This life is no more than a preparation, a practice round, if you will, for better things to come. In the final analysis, we have to rely on God's power to accomplish anything truly worthwhile.

In life as in golf, it’s in mastering the basics that enables us to play both games consistently. With this tip we have included a life training aid entitled “The Quality of Life Test”. We would suggest you take the test to determine just how this practice round is going for you.

Its quality living that will determine when we breathe our last that we can say, “It is finished!” On the other hand, on the tombstone of those who are keeping score and trying to win at all costs will be the inscription, “Dead, But Never Used Up!”

Which Will It Be For You?

What The Deuce Is A “UBU”?

If you play golf you’ve certainly hit a UBU from time to time. In fact, you’ve probably hit many UBUs in your golfing career. You know the shot – it’s half hit; maybe hits a tree; maybe skims across water, and you come out smelling like a rose. In one of our golf fellowships, when someone hits one of those shots I’ve just described, you are sure to hear someone yell, “UBU!” Now that you’ve got the drift of what a UBU is, I’ll disclose to you that it stands for Ugly – But Useful.

Most golfers would rather look good than play good. The key however is getting the job done. Trevino, Chi Chi, Sanders, Furyk, and Old “Mr. X” Miller Barber to name a few weren’t pretty, but they sure got the job done. You might say their swings were “ugly - but very useful!”

Comedian Billy Crystal made famous a line from an old actor that he would mimic, “I’d much rather look marvelous than feel marvelous” and that’s exactly how many of us live our lives today. We’re so caught up with looking good on the outside to cover up the hurt on the inside that we’ve come to believe the smokescreen we’ve created. Did you determine the quality of your life in the last tip? If not, you’ll have another chance with this one.

As a kid caddying I actually knew a young rich kid who loved to play golf but as we used to say, he couldn’t hit a “bull in the %&@ with a shovel.” This was in the ‘60s when Palmer was king. This kid had a bag like Arnie, had Arnie’s movements down, and tried to imitate Arnie’s swing - problem was he hit the ball like Betsy Palmer.

Then there’s the story about the late great boxer Rocky Graziano. Story has it Graziano (if you remember was a bit challenged by the English language) was giving a talk at a college when some young intellectual in the audience continually corrected Graziano’s English. Eventually Rocky reached his limit and said to the student, “You know, if I spoke as good as you, I’d be broke today.”

Where are you in life? **Right now!** Are you living trying to develop a picture perfect swing in life **and deep inside you know what people see is really not what they’re getting?** Or, maybe you’re a UBU as today’s competitive environment might see it, but you’re getting the job done better and better everyday, no matter what “bad lies” life throws at you.

Hey yous guys. I’m gonna tell you something right now. Consider it pure joy when The Big Guy throws some of life’s UBUs your way, because it’s in facing dem there trials of the life that yous gotta keep getting’ back up and keep swingin’.

Have You "OB'd" Your Old Life, or Have You Just Declared it a Lost Ball?

Under Rule 27-1 of the U.S.G.A.'s Rules of Golf - Ball Lost or Out of Bounds... If a ball is lost or is out of bounds, the player **must** play a ball, under penalty of one stroke, as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played.

Exceptions: **1).** If there is reasonable evidence that the original ball is lost in a water hazard, the player must proceed in accordance with Rule 26-1. **2).** If there is reasonable evidence that the original ball is lost in an obstruction (Rule 24-3) or an abnormal ground condition (Rule 25-1c) the player may proceed under the applicable Rule.

Did you know that a golfer can actually find their ball after hitting a provisional ball and declare the first ball lost as long as they incur a penalty of one stroke? Whereas a ball hit out of bounds is gone from play forever since the rules leave no choice to play it or the provisional ball.

Come to think of it, isn't that exactly the way many of us live the Christian life? We boast about being a "new creation" yet seldom do we hear a person boast about their crucifixion or "White Funeral" as Oswald Chambers so eloquently puts it. Basically we're playing the Christian life conveniently deciding do I play the found lost ball (the old life), or do I play the provisional and take the penalty? With all the hustling I've done in my life on the golf course, I've seen many balls miraculously find an opening in the trees as the rest of the group departs from the hunt and the player who hit the shot remains in the woods. There was also the old strategy of cup another ball in your hand, brush the high grass with both hands, and with palm down place the ball where there is an opening. Get it!

When was the last time you picked up your old life and took control of things? Rather than just toying with life's out of bounds lines, you may even have dropped a new ball as if God doesn't see it. Problem is when we get that desperate on the course and in life, we become so disillusioned that we actually believe we found the ball.

We all know a brother or sister in Christ that, when the heat was on, said some of the most hurtful things possible and then justified it. We've all heard the intellectually justified character assassinations that take place in our churches while each side quotes the precious Word of God in our prideful struggles to be right. Fact is, the true mature Christian will admit they are wrong in a heartbeat **even if they are not** in order that God is unmistakably given the glory. What's most important is that **HE** is always right.

Unless you've knocked the old life out of bounds, you're apt to play the lost ball in life as needed. If you're one of those who thinks their testimony is boring, stop looking for the person with the so-called "powerful testimony" that you use as the barometer for how bad you're not. Fact is, their testimony was probably as boring as yours until they "OB'd" their old life with complete abandon and came to the stark realization that they too were equally responsible for the wounds of Christ.

"Self Pity is the Favorite Indoor Sport of the Losers in Life"

In the movie "The Hustler" George C. Scott is quoted saying to Paul Newman, "Self Pity is the favorite indoor sport of the losers in life."

Let's look at how Webster's defines "Self Pity" - *pity for oneself, esp. a self-indulgent attitude concerning one's own difficulties, hardships, etc.* The "key" words here are "a self-indulgent attitude."

Do you suffer with the PLOMs? "The Poor Little Ol' Me's." How often do we succumb to this temptation? On the golf course we certainly know how creative the excuses get. In life as well as in golf, usually it's an excuse for not doing what we know we should do, *and want to do* but do not have the courage and character to do. It's also a way to manipulate others into doing for us that which we should be doing ourselves but we lack the courage and character.

In golf as well as in life, if we spend our time moaning and groaning about how unfairly the course or life is treating us, we have zero chance of winning at either game except in our minds. We'll stay that little kid over the winning putt as we hear the crowd cheer and we act as commentator, crowd, and winner in our imaginary rather than purposeful life. Or we'll be the most successful person we know yet each time we look into the mirror we know we are a fraud but we are powerless on our indulgence in our life protecting terminal uniqueness.

In sports and in life, winning comes from doing the things most won't. That's what builds a winning character. I watched Bobby Valentine growing up. While Bobby beamed with talent, he wasn't that much more talented than many of us but he blew us away in character and going the distance.

Want to win? Examine closely the words "a self-indulgent attitude" in your life. If you tend to make excuses because of an entitlement chip both on the course and in life, my bet is there is some history of dependence somewhere in the family tree. You see, "*indulgence*" comes in the form of both liquid and action and the dis-ease of dependence is in part medically defined as the dis-ease of extremes.

Winning is more about character than talent and there is really just one way to find it. Nike tells us "Just Do It!" where Jesus tells us in John 5, "Pick Up Your Life And Win!" God loves you and wants to bless you richly, so win for Him!

Judging Distance from the Sand

Oh the bunkers! One of the duly named "hazards" on the course. How in the world did the golf architects know exactly where to place these nagging buggers? However, before you can figure out how to judge the distance from a bunker there are two things you need to know, what they are, and the dynamics behind getting out. Let's look at what the U.S.G.A. has to say from the Rules...

"Except as provided in the *Rules*, before making a stroke at a ball that is in a *hazard* (whether a *bunker* or a *water hazard*) or that, having been lifted from a *hazard*, may be dropped or placed in the *hazard*, the player must not: (a) Test the condition of the *hazard* or any similar *hazard*; (b) Touch the ground in the *hazard* or water in the *water hazard* with his hand or a club; or (c) Touch or move a *loose impediment* lying in or touching the *hazard*."

Modern day instructors tell us that the length of the follow through determines how far the ball will travel from the sand with of course the key being you have found "the bottom" of your swing. The older instructors felt that it was the length of the backswing and the degree to which the golfer opened their clubface that determined the distance of the shot.

The same holds true once you have determined "the bottom" of your life. We will never be able to go the distance as we hit life's hazards if we live looking back basking in the "Poor-Me's". It's all about what we do going forward that determines how our lives will turn out. However, the great golfers develop keen course management strategies that involve playing away from the hazards on the course. In life we must also play away from the hazards.

For instance, those closest to you will almost inevitably remind you about the things you did in the past that hurt them. Old character traits are going to pop up from time to time making us look back. You see, hazards are strategically placed in such a way as to bait us into doing something dumb both on and off the course. That's the key to remember!

Let's examine the rule more closely regarding the hazards on the course and it will help you in the hazards of life also.

"The player must not: (a) Test the condition of the *hazard* or any similar *hazard*;" Ever wonder why a golfer digs their feet into the sand? Sure it's for better footing but according to the rule, while the golfer cannot touch the sand with their club or hands, they can't help but testing the texture with their feet. In life having a firm footing on God's Word will help you gauge your life going forward.

"The player must not: (b) Touch the ground in the *hazard* or water in the *water hazard* with his hand or a club; or (c) Touch or move a *loose impediment* lying in or touching the *hazard*." Unlike striking the ball outside the hazards, it's the sand that carries the ball out of a hazard and takes it to its destination. Just as in the hazards in life, we need to take our gritty hands off things and allow God to carry us to the destination He has determined for us going forward.

When its Breezy...Swing it Easy

Well, another year is upon us and it's that time when we make resolutions. The most popular, of course, are weight loss and quitting smoking. Then there are those where we shoot for the sky. More money, increased sales quotas, a larger or second home, a fancier country club or car and so on.

We all know while there are no guarantees, one thing is for certain, life hits us all at one time or another, and some even get more than their fair share. Then its when the gusty winds of life swirl around us in the form of sickness, death, financial uncertainty, business failures, and strained relationships, that we tend to seize back control of life and even attempt to control the lives of others and solve the situation our way.

Yet, a famous tip of Bobby Jones was "when you are hitting into the wind, accept your loss of distance and swing within yourself." Maintaining balance is most critical. But you know the way it goes. We grab the club a bit tighter, widen our stance a bit, and the big dog is ready to eat.

In life we do the same thing, don't we? Oh, we talk about giving up control usually while we're playing with a winning hand, but when we come right down to it, we usually end up gripping life tighter, taking an immovable stance while holding our prideful ground, and the next thing we know our lives and the lives of those we're trying to control are out of balance; and the chaos sets in.

On the course, trying to overpower the wind magnifies the curve of a slice or hook, and trying to overpower life magnifies and complicates things almost every time.

So, as we begin the New Year, get accountable, stay in the present, and play life one day at a time. Remember what Jesus said to the multitudes during the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not be anxious but seek first of all God's kingdom and His way of playing life and He will supply your needs and then some. And do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own" (**Matthew 6**)

So, swing it easy! We play golf one hole at a time and we play life one day at a time.

These Guys Are Good!

I believe it was the UBS Hong Kong Open, one of the final events on the 2006 European Tour's season, which Jim Furyk hit an errant tee shot and his playing partner Ian Poulter accidentally stepped on the ball while the group was looking for it. The rules official then determined that Furyk was entitled to a drop because the lie was unplayable. Furyk responded by saying that the decision wasn't fair because the lie was actually unplayable before Poulter stepped on the ball. Huh!

Earlier in the season at the 2006 British Open, David Toms was literally the only person in the world who saw his ball move while he was over a putt. The Royal and Ancient reviewed the occurrence from various angles numerous times via video tape and determined the ball didn't in fact move. Toms just didn't feel right about the decision and disqualified himself. Are these guys good...or nuts, some might ask?

In a day when other professional athletes are denying using performance enhancing drugs in order to get the edge and shatter records, what is it that makes these golfers such a rare breed while some of these others are being embarrassed out of their sports and could even face federal prosecution? Imagine if we played the game of life the same way these professionals play the game of golf what a great world it would be? When you really come down to it, isn't the way they conduct themselves on the course the exact way Christ wants us to conduct ourselves in life?

One of the first things a golfer must do on the course is to realize they are powerless over results. I heard Peter Jacobsen say that "golf is all about managing your mistakes and knowing your limitations." One of the first things we need to do in life is to actually have a revulsion against ourselves and face our limitations, and surrender, surrender, surrender.

Then do what the PGA Tour does so well, serve, serve, and serve, those who can benefit from your life experience remembering the following...

"Give something to those that will accept it. Give to them the experience, strength, and hope of your personal life experience as it has been given to you by the Grace of God through Jesus Christ. REMEMBER ALWAYS...the giving of advice can never take the place of the giving of self."

“The More I Practice The Luckier I Get”

This week’s title is actually a quote made famous by golfing great Ben Hogan. It’s said Hogan had a weekly practice session unlike any other of the professionals. He would drive up to the course the trunk of his car would pop open, he would pull out two golf bags filled with numerous clubs and he would precision practice for an entire day.

Why do you think the greats like Hogan, Palmer, Nicklaus, and Woods have all the luck? Why is it these guys seem to make the dramatic shots right when they need to? Were they born under a lucky star while the rest were born under a dark cloud?

I grew up in Stamford, CT with Bobby Valentine. Sure he had a God-given gift and ability, but he went at his dream constantly. Why was it no surprise that Bobby always made the clutch hit or the crucial play? All these professionals did what the others in their sport didn’t.

After being asked countless times over the years for his secret, Hogan answered, “The secret is in the dirt, and you’ve gotta dig it out.” You know, most of our greatness in life lies in the dirt of our life. In the secrets, the denial, the excuses and the poor-me’s. Unfortunately for most of us it’s much easier to stay where we’re familiar and live life making excuses and blaming.

Fact is, if we spent as much time doing the things most won’t, we would enjoy the things most can’t. Instead many of us take the easy way out and plan our next victim’s party. Problem is no one beats the system forever. There is always a price to pay, and the pure hell of it just might be looking back on your life when it’s too late to do anything about it.

"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects the wind; the realist adjusts the sails."

-Anonymous

Time to Get Back to the Basics of Life

While watching The Golf Channel at the end of the 2006 season, I saw a wrap up of the year's USGA events. The segment ended by saying that the USGA was inundated with letters from angry parents blaming the USGA for poor course conditions during the season's Junior events which caused their kids to play badly. Oh my!

In the January, 2007 issue of Golf Magazine, Hal Sutton was interviewed saying, "I don't agree with a lot that Johnny Miller says, (And who does? I honestly mute the TV during an NBC golf telecast) but I totally agree with his closing comments at the 2006 Ryder Cup when he said the state of American golf has never been where it is right now. We need to start Junior programs that are caring, loving, inviting, ***and not controlling.***"

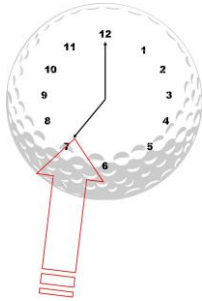
Here's a promise . . . In this world we will have bad lies on the course and in life, but fear not because God has conquered the course and the world. Parents had better realize learning to play the bad lies develop the greatest ball strikers. Making up excuses and fighting their battles will only develop more "prima Donnas" that the European golfers can make minced meat out of. Parents today need to stop playing God in their kid's lives and introduce the kids to God giving Him the reins. Kids today need to know they are being misled and Sundays were not made for the NY Times. Can I get a Praise God?!

A few years back PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem, when being interviewed regarding the new tour said, and I paraphrase, "I'm concerned because with big money comes big problems." Golf is not just another sports option to make our kids bonus babies so they can live the good life. During this year's Bob Hope tournament, host George Lopez said, "Everything a son can learn from a father, I learned from the game of golf." With the amount of parent-less children we have today as a result of the over-achieving ***high*** many of us are on, golf and its principles just might be a kid's last shot for shaping their lives.

It's time to get back to the basics in life, let our kids be kids and stop shaping their lives around the things we didn't get that we feel we were and/or are entitled to. We are just passing through and it's time we realize this round of life is just a mini-tour event for the real life to come.

The Golf Ball Is Hit At 7 O'clock – What?

Without a doubt, the most valuable ball striking tip I received from Lee Trevino was that precision accuracy is a result of hitting the ball at 7 o'clock. Now, what does that mean?



Having been on and off the lesson tee for over 30 years now, I can tell you that when you ask a golfer which part of the ball they are looking at they will tell you “the top”. Yet, it’s actually the lower back half of the ball that should be our target, and precisely 7 o’clock at that. Of course that would be 5 o’clock if you play from the left side.

This is without a doubt the move that separates a golfer from someone who plays golf. I heard Raymond Floyd say that he will narrow his focus down to a single dimple. That’s precision!

We seem to be losing the need for precision in golf as well as in life because both are being made too easy for us. Technology has made hitting the ball a whole lot easier. Now we even have the birth of hybrids which has reinvented the long iron game. Technology has certainly put information at our finger tips 24/7 making many facets of life a whole lot easier. The result, convenience and instant gratification have become entitlements.

Many of us today can unfortunately be defined as hybrid Christians. We’re committed to a degree when life is giving us the right bounces. But as soon as we get a bad break on the course of life and determine we’ve had enough, we begin flirting with the out of bounds lines as we interject some on the spot local rules rationalizing then eventually compromising the precision in our living. In other words, we “pick it up” and put our W.W.J.D. wrist band in our pocket (get my drift) and our scorecard for that chapter of life has a “WD” (withdrew) written on it.

It’s our commitment to precision in life and golf that leads to victory in the majors of both. In life precision living will help us discover the gift of finding “our purpose” and “what works for us” setting us up for the major victory in life. Then as we take the victory walk up the final fairway of this life The Lord can greet us by saying, “Well done my good and faithful servant!”

Remember the words of Bagger Vance, “golf like life is a game that cannot be won, just played” which is the title of our next tip.

Golf Like Life Is A Game That Cannot Be Won - Just Played

We've all heard the saying, "He who dies with the most toys wins." If that is your attitude, then golf in your life will stand for **Going Out Lost Forever**. The Bible tells us, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet loses his life in the process."

We're all called to show up for each daily round of life - **and play it**, play it focused and with integrity. You see, it's the quality of our life that determines its real value, not whether we win or lose. In order for our lives to have real value, we must set the standard of a Hogan, Nicklaus, or Woods. The eventual champions in this life live lives of honesty, purity, *selflessness*, and love. Our lives ought to be judged by this standard in determining their real value to God and our fellow man. By this standard, most of the so-called winners really are not winners at all.

On the other side of the coin we've all said at one time or another, "No matter what I do, I just can't seem to win." *Now you're talking!* Life is a game of opposites, just like golf. It's in dying that we have life, and it's in losing that we win the ultimate victory; that is of course if the "One" who is the "Life" runs our life and we have sincerely abandoned our life to Him.

The fact is if you are one of those who is always pressing and frustrated on the course due to focusing on *score, score, score*, I can guarantee you golf isn't really worth playing. Just as in life, if you are one of those who is always pressing and keeping score of your entitlements, money, righting your wrongs, and being held captive by a long resentful memory, life isn't even worth living.

Our lives must have quality in order to make them worthwhile and purposeful. This life is no more than a preparation, a practice round, if you will, for better things to come. In the final analysis, we have to rely on God's power to accomplish anything truly worthwhile.

In life as in golf, it's in mastering the basics that enables us to play both games consistently. With this tip we have included a life training aid entitled "The Quality of Life Test". We would suggest you take the test to determine just how this practice round is going for you.

Its quality living that will determine when we breathe our last that we can say, "It is finished!" On the other hand, on the tombstone of those who are keeping score and trying to win at all costs will be the inscription, "Dead, But Never Used Up!"

Which Will It Be For You?

What The Duce Is A “UBU”?

If you play golf you’ve sure hit a UBU from time to time. In fact, you’ve probably hit many UBUs in your golfing career. You know the shot – its half hit, maybe hits a tree, maybe skims across water, and you come out smelling like a rose. In one of our golf fellowships, when someone hits one of those shots I’ve just described, you are sure to hear someone yell, “UBU”. Now that you’ve got the drift of what a UBU is, I’ll disclose to you that it stands for: Ugly – But Useful.

Most golfers would rather look good then play good. The key however is getting the job done. Trevino, Chi Chi, Sanders, Furyk, and Old “Mr. X” Miller Barber to name a few weren’t pretty, but they sure got the job done. You might say their swings were “Ugly - But *Very* Useful!”

Comedian Billy Crystal made famous a line from an old actor that he would mimic, “I’d much rather look marvelous than feel marvelous”, and come to think of it, that’s exactly how many of us live our lives today. We’re so caught up with looking good on the outside to cover up the hurt on the inside that we’ve come to believe the smokescreen we’ve created. Did you determine the quality of your life in the last tip? If not, you’ll have another chance with this one.

As a kid caddying I actually knew a young rich kid who loved to play golf but as we used to say, he couldn’t hit a “bull in the %&@ with a shovel.” This was in the 60’s when Palmer was king and this kid had a bag like Arnie, had Arnie’s movements down, and tried to imitate Arnie’s swing - problem was he hit the ball like Betsy Palmer.

Then there’s the story about the late great boxer Rocky Graziano. Story has it Graziano (if you remember was a bit challenged by the English language) was giving a talk at a college when some young intellectual in the audience continually corrected Graziano’s use of the English language. Eventually Rocky reached his limit and said to the student, “You know, if I spoke as good as *you*’s, I’d be broke today.”

Where are you in life? ***Right now!*** Are you living trying to develop a picture perfect swing in life **and deep inside you know what people see is really not what they’re getting?** Or maybe you’re a UBU as today’s competitive environment might see it, but you’re getting the job done better and better everyday, no matter what “bad lies” life throws at you.

Hey *you*’s guys. I’m *gonna* tell you something right now. Consider it pure joy when The Big Guy *throws* some of life’s UBUs your way, because it’s in facing them there trials of the life that *you*’s gotta keep getting back up and keep *swingin*’.

Have You "OB'd" Your Old Life, Or Have You Just Declared It A Lost Ball?

Under Rule 27-1 of the U.S.G.A.'s Rules of Golf - Ball Lost or Out of Bounds... If a ball is lost or is out of bounds, the player **must** play a ball, **under penalty of one stroke**, as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played.

Exceptions: 1). *If there is reasonable evidence that the original ball is lost in a water hazard, the player must proceed in accordance with Rule 26-1. 2).* *If there is reasonable evidence that the original ball is lost in an obstruction (Rule 24-3) or an abnormal ground condition (Rule 25-1c) the player may proceed under the applicable Rule.*

Did you know that a golfer can actually find their ball after hitting a provisional ball and declare the first ball lost as long as they incur a penalty of one stroke? Whereas a ball hit out of bounds is gone from play forever since the rules leave no choice to play it - or the provisional ball.

Come to think of it, isn't that exactly the way many of us live the Christian life? We boast about being a "new creation" yet seldom do we hear a person boast about their crucifixion or "White Funeral" as Oswald Chambers so eloquently puts it. Basically we're playing the Christian life conveniently deciding, do I play the found lost ball (the old life), or do I play the provisional and take the penalty? With all the hustling I've done in my life on the golf course, I've seen many balls miraculously find an opening in the trees as the rest of the group departs from the hunt and the player who hit the shot remains in the woods. There was also the old "cup another ball in your hand, brush the high grass with both hands and with palm down place the ball" of course where there is an opening. Get it!

When was the last time you picked up your old life and took control of things? Rather than just toying with life's out of bounds lines, you may even have dropped a new ball as if God doesn't see it. Problem is when we get that desperate on the course and in life, we become so disillusioned that we actually believe we found the ball.

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Judging Distance from the Sand

Oh the bunkers! One of the duly named “hazards” on the course. How in the world did the golf architects know exactly where to place these nagging buggers? However, before you can figure out how to judge the distance from a bunker there are two things you need to know, what they are, and the dynamics behind getting out. Let’s look at what the U.S.G.A. has to say from the Rules...

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Next we would suggest you read Playing from the Sand in order to understand the dynamics of getting out of the bunkers in life and on the course.

Modern day instructors tell us that the length of the follow through determines how far the ball will travel from the sand with of course the key being you have found “the bottom” of your swing. The older instructors felt that it was the length of the backswing and the degree to which the golfer opened their clubface that determined the distance of the shot.

The same holds true once you have determined “the bottom” of your life. We will never be able to go the distance as we hit life’s hazards if we live looking back basking in the “Poor-Me’s”. It’s all about what we do going forward that determines how our lives will turn out. However, the great golfers develop keen course management strategies that involve playing away from the hazards on the course. In life we must also play away from the hazards.

For instance, those closest to you will almost inevitably remind you about the things you did in the past that hurt them. Old character traits are going to pop up from time to time making us look back. You see, hazards are strategically placed in such a way as to bait us into doing something dumb both on and off the course. That’s the key to remember!

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takes it to its destination. Just as in the hazards in life, we need to take our gritty hands off things and allow God to carry us to the destination **He** has determined for us going forward.

At The Heart Of It All

During my brief professional golfing career, I found myself in a few situations where the pressure was on - really on. For instance in 1974 I was playing pretty well and I found myself in the qualifying round for the US Open that would be held that year at Winged Foot. I can tell you it's at those times what's really inside us comes out. There's just no white knuckling it. You get the feeling you're competing while having an out of body experience. Those who have competed at that level know only too well what I'm talking about.

For the last several years my father has been battling Parkinson's disease and for almost a year now his condition has been very unstable to say the least. During this time my mother had a fluke fall and suffered a severe brain hemorrhage and died within 48 hours. My mother was a woman of strong conviction and a deep faith so the decision to honor her living will and let her go home was made easy for my sister and me. While it became clear to me through my mother's death that God's ways were not my ways, I believe God has spoken to me through my father's illness which I would like to share with you.

I hear God asking me "Is it well with your soul?" I have become aware of just how important death is as a testimony to what's really inside of us - just like a major competition brings it out. Stick with me now!

Being in ministry for nearly eleven years, I have seen several people who I have come to know over these years stricken with mentally debilitating conditions such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Stroke, and a rare Autoimmune disease. What I've observed upon either talking to or visiting them is when a person is no longer cognitively capable of putting on a false front, or when they are facing sure death, what's really inside them comes out.

As medical science increases longevity I've been thinking "What will my final testimony be to my loved ones should I live to a ripe old age as they say, or I'm diagnosed with a terminal disease and I'm playing the final holes of this qualifying round of life?" Will my family see **the real me** - and be proud to have known me? Or will my final breath be an eye opening scar they are left to grieve over?

So I've been asking myself, "Is it well with my soul?" *Is it well with yours?* By clicking the link of the song title, you will be taken to a site where you can hear the music as you read the words. It Is Well With My Soul. I would suggest you selflessly meditate on the words daily as you listen to the music. You will without a doubt put new depth into your game for when you face the biggest shot of your life.

In Christ's Saving Grace!

And There Were Shepherds Living Out In The Fields Nearby

The game of golf evolved from a game of the shepherds to a game of royalty and the privileged in Europe, to the game of the rich in the USA, and now back to the game of the people with its popularity worldwide in the 21st century. Research shows the shepherd's would take those long, slender rods used to prod livestock and use the hook end of the crook to thwack a stone or pebble as far as they could propel it. In short order, there would be boasting between young men as to which could hit a stone the farthest and soon after, which could hit the most accurate shot.

Then to measure the accuracy of a stroke, there had to be a target. Likely the earliest targets were trees or bushes or a stake driven into the ground. And if you were herding your flock from pasture to market, it would reason that you'd need a series of targets along the route to market. As you passed by one target, you'd begin your competition anew and hit the stones towards your next target. Some say the game is as old as Moses and the research *does* mention a game played by Roman soldiers remarkably similar to golf. As the Roman Empire spread across Europe, so did the game.

I can't help feeling that when Jesus returns this fantastic game is the only game He could possible play since it is so much in line with how He wants us to live. Little did we know that the same men who were one of the first to visit the newborn King, would also set the ethics for a game that would emulate His way of life.

Golf sure has come a long way – hasn't it? Golfers have gone from hitting rocks with a staff to hitting golf balls with clubs so technically advanced that it's gone from a game of feel to a game of science. Many would argue much like life today.

Today we live in the information age of technology and the day of emotional intelligence where we justify our decisions by what we “feel” they should be. Intellectual-*ism* has put us in the center of our lives. Science and technology has become a god for many who feel old fashioned ethics are no longer relevant yet relative-*ism* has become the new ethic of convenience.

The following joke I heard speaks to this. A plane en route from New York to California lost one of its engines. When the pilot alerted the passengers there was a young businessman on his computer who did a quick calculation and told the passengers that all it meant was they would be arriving a bit later. Shortly thereafter the pilot came back on the intercom to alert the passengers that they had now lost the remaining engine. The crowd began to panic while the businessman made another calculation and out of frustration says, “At this rate we're gonna be up here forever”.

What would we do without computers? Thank God Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

The Fairway Is Not Always Fair

I remember like it was yesterday teeing it up in the Connecticut Open in my younger days and as usual well prepared for the competition. The morning of the tournament I got to the club early, went through my warm-up routine and walked to the first tee. The tee was crowded with spectators and the local press which added to the usual first tee jitters. My name was announced; I took a deep breath, went through my extra careful first tee pre-shot routine and patted a drive that split the center of the fairway.

When my caddie and I got to the ball it was resting smack in a fresh divot that another competitor neglected to replace. Instead of taking another deep breath and preparing to hit the shot which I had practiced hundreds of times, I instead was overcome by the bad break. I knocked a 5 iron in the bunker left, and bogeyed the hole and my day was over.

How many times in life do we let something or someone ruin an entire day for us? Things that may have happened years ago that still have their grip on us today.

If you've been to a circus or have seen one on television, you've almost surely seen the elephant's parade around the rink trunk to tail. I just learned recently from Dr. A.R. Bernard that from the day an elephant is born, they are tied to a three foot stake that is driven into the ground and that teaches them to remain still. Animal trainers will tell you that you can take a full grown elephant, tie a rope to their trunk, leave the rope bound to nothing, and that elephant will never move. That's where the saying "an elephant never forgets comes from".

How many of us allow things or people from our pasts that we are no longer bound to, to continue to have a hold on us? Like the elephant, we never forget and we allow things that no longer have an ounce of power over us to rent free space in our heads - like that ball sitting in the divot did to me.

Life's not fair just like the fairway. I was thinking maybe the fairway should be renamed, the short grass that has divots some clowns don't replace!" Gee, could the incident I mentioned in the opening of this tip that happened 34 years ago still have a hold on me? Fact is when life was not fair to Christ, he freed Himself by saying "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do".

So the next time you awake to a new day and then something that has should really have no remaining hold on you grips you, use an affirmation from Jesus and say, "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do" and you too will be freed.

NEXT: We add to the Legend's of G.O.L.F. with a tribute to Bart "Schwartz" Swift.

Bart “Schwartz” Swift

If you were one who was blessed to know Bart, you will understand only too well as I say when God created him He really broke the mold. The stories he told were endless and the one-liners he had down to a science, especially when he broke into his Henny Youngman shtick as straight faced as he could be.

For instance, I was with a group of men sitting around a church one Saturday morning talking about marriage and how busy we all were along with the difficulty we all had connecting with our wives. Of course, looking to Bart for some wisdom he tells us as straight-faced as could be, “You’ve gotta make time for your wife. For instance my wife and I go out to dinner twice a week. She goes on Tuesday and I go Thursday.” Then out of the blue we’re all in a crack up and we would laugh thinking about Ole Schwartz for days.

Then there was the day he told us the story of the cat up on the roof. I think it had something to do with somebody house sitting for a cat and then the cat died and when the owners of the cat returned home they were told the cat was on the roof??? It had nothing to do with the morning’s topic but nevertheless we laughed for months about that stupid cat being on the roof. So when Bart went home last week (or went up on the roof as he put it) I looked at the words to that James Taylor song and some of the words sure explained parts of Bart’s life.

“When this old world starts getting me down and people are just too much for me to face. I climb way up to the top of the stairs and all my cares just drift right into space. On the roof, it's peaceful as can be and there the world below can't bother me.”

In his early years the roof was his escape from life. We heard the stories of his warrior days with Jonathan Winters and Hollywood midgets doing flips on his living room floor. I could only imagine how crazy those times must have been. As Bart said “we would go out on the town for days at a time.”

Then close to fifty years ago as the song goes on to say...“Right smack dab in the middle of the town Bart found a Paradise that's trouble proof.” Bart no longer needed the 90 proof!

Right now Bart’s on that roof in Paradise and he probably has his Brother Jesus doubled over while asking Christ to pray with him as the Bible tells us “for that one” who as he would tell me is just like I was.

So I’ll bet my pal Schwartz is singing right now...”And if this world starts getting you down there's room enough for two - Up on the roof.”

Schwartz, I’m missing the heck out of you already but I’m thankful that I’ll see you up on that roof someday and I pray that that “one” (we talked about many times) takes that Precious Hand so they too can sit with us forever “trouble proof” up on that heavenly roof.

William “Willie” Carlucci

Wow! This will probably be the most difficult of all the testimonials I’ve written for CC of Life’s Hall of Fame. Those I have written before have been for men in my Christian family. This one is for the man who as he used to say “I brought you into this world and I can take you out”; the man who taught me about my faith.

Being heavily focused in men’s ministry over these last 11 years, I have seen firsthand the powerful relationship between men and their fathers. Or should I say “boys” and their fathers since no matter what the age, there is that *something* that keeps that hero in our lives on his pedestal.

Growing up, I thought my Dad was a weird guy because he was not like the other kid’s fathers. The other kids would tell me about the magazines (you know the ones I mean) their fathers had. I would look high and low for my Dads’, never finding anything. He was always around the church when I was growing up which made me feel like he was soft. When he would come home for lunch while working, he never took more than a half-hour which I couldn’t understand since no one would have known. Just yesterday my wife and I were talking and we said how he was taking confidantialities with him that he held onto for years. When he was asked not to say something, no one (including my mother) knew. To be honest, I was ashamed of my Dad in my teens because I didn’t think he was cool.

Then, having children of my own certainly helped me to see my father differently and all of a sudden what he taught me came in handy. As I got older I began to gain a whole new respect for my Dad. Then seven years ago when I watched him tremble from head to toe as he viewed my brother in a casket, I became his dad. The trembling ran a reflex responsibility through me as I grabbed and supported him. Over these last years of his life, I was blessed to see the little boy in his eyes and I was able to come to complete forgiveness for those things to which I felt he didn’t measure up to.

Honestly, when first hearing the poem “God’s Hall of Fame”, which has become a preamble of sorts for the Legends of G.O.L.F., I thought about my Dad. One of the things that annoyed me about him growing up was how all he did was *do* for people and never got anything back. Anything people noticed that was! I later realized that this bugged me so much because I was just like him, but had a bit more pride and was angry that I wasn’t noticed more. I can thank him for that revelation today because without his foundation, I would have never allowed that truth to enter into my life.

Most of all over these last very difficult years with his illness, I felt especially blessed for the God-consciousness he instilled in me since I was usually able to find some blessing in his illness. I know I’ll miss seeing him but his mannerisms, laugh, cough, and thick-headedness are solidly genetically planted; as well as some of those things I didn’t like in him.

Once again God uses His amazing sense of humor to slam – dunk yours truly communicating with me as the thickhead I am reminding me to take the plank out of my eye.

"99% of Putts Left Short Never Go In!" Thanks Yogi!

"99% of Putts Left Short Never Go In!" Thanks Yogi!

On the golf course we've all seen it one time or another. A perfectly hit putt is heading straight to the center of hole and it stops dead on the lip. Then as we begin walking towards the ball in disbelief to tap it in, the ball begins to turn ever so slowly and drops into the hole.

According to the U.S.G.A.'s rules of play, "When any part of the ball overhangs the lip of the hole, the player is allowed enough time to reach the hole without unreasonable delay and an additional ten seconds to determine whether the ball is at rest. If by then the ball has not fallen into the hole, it is deemed to be at rest. If the ball subsequently falls into the hole, the player is deemed to have holed out with his last stroke and must add a penalty stroke to his score for the hole; otherwise, there is no penalty under this Rule."

While a lot of yardage has been gained as a result of Yogi Berra's quotes, there's some real accuracy to this one. For instance, I can remember getting up early one Saturday morning many years ago to head to my first men's Bible study at a church where I knew no one. I walked down the hallway to the room where the study was being held, got cold feet and stopped right at the door. Then when my head was telling me to turn around, my hand turned the door knob and I dropped in.

Without even a bible in hand, I watched in total intimidation as the men were flipping book to book reading verses all over the place. I had no idea of what a concordance was and that these guys weren't all that smart. After the study was over, one of the men took me aside and told me to come back the next week with an NIV Study Bible Red Letter Edition and told me where to go and buy it. When I got home with the bible I went to the Table of Contents and as I was scrolling down the various books I saw Malachi. I thought it was pronounced *Malachie* and thought I would begin reading about biblical bookmakers. It's been over 20 years and I have still never lived that one down. Then I heard of a guy who thought the Epistles were the wives of the Apostles and I felt like a theologian next to him.

All kidding aside, my bet is you have had an experience like mine at some time in life, then "*Something*" gave you that little nudge and you ended up doing the exact thing you were apprehensive about doing.

So, the next time you're living life on the edge, **H.A.L.T.** Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired. Guaranteed you will be displaying one or more of these symptoms - **Stop!** Get with your caddie and don't play life alone.

**Do We Actually "Win" At Times,
Or Do We "Back In" Off The Mistakes Of Others?**

For a number of the past years, the talk around the golf world was all about Tiger Woods shattering Jack Nicklaus' major tournament record. When it came to major tournaments Jack was king. He had a very unique way of preparing for each one of them. A large part of Jack's preparation was his intense mental discipline.

Jack mastered the art of patience because he learned winning majors comes of course by out playing the field, but they also come as other competitor's lose patience and he had himself in position to take the lead.

Patience is critical if we are going to win at the game of life. The Book of Proverbs tells us, *"Better a 'patient' man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city"*.

How many times in everyday life does our lack of patience (our compulsion to control outcomes, i.e. forcing the close of a deal or forcing someone into a decision), cause us to fall short of victory and allow a competitor to sneak in?

As we practice the art of patience, it's critical that we understand the difference between *"acting"* (*being prepared when life mounts is charge*) vs *"reacting"* (*being caught off guard*).

In his book [Golf My Way], Jack writes that 40% of mis-hit shots occur before the golfer ever starts their swing. That's how critical the basics of Grip, Posture and Alignment are. Same holds true in life. While I don't know the exact percentage, when we start the day without putting God first, chances are we will mis-hit the day before we step out the door.

"Excuse Me, But Does Your Husband Play?"

Another comical expression that a golfer might hear his buddies say when he hits a rather weak shot is, *"Excuse me, but does your husband play?"* Unfortunately, if you ask many women in churches today, *"Excuse me, but does your husband lead you and your family to church?"* You will hear a disappointing *"No!"*

When asked why this is, alarmingly far too many men said they see clergy life as a safe field, a refuge from the challenges of life. When asked, these men tell us that due to their cloistered existence, many clergy are clueless of the challenges facing today's men. While the clergy are quick to help women and youth with their problems, today's men feel many times they are labeled as the problem. Might there be some truth to this?

Many churches use youth programs as their attraction, figuring if they get youth excited their parents will follow. Problem is using our youth to do a man's job and according to the statistics widely quoted from the Barna Institute, only 3% of families actually follow their children to church. While women far outnumber men in active roles in churches, the study shows only 17% of families follow a woman to church. Yet, when a man attends church, 97% of families will follow.

Christian men tell us they need a manly message and support from the church that can be used to fulfill their Biblical roles as the spiritual leaders, teachers, and defenders of their faith, families and communities. It's time we take back our families *and get back in the game*, and stop being portrayed as weak, ineffective, and no match for a wiser wife and even kids for that matter. It's time to take the fight to the enemy and take our positions *on the front lines* as to both *"Who"* and *"Whose"* we are both personally and vocationally as do those in other faiths, and my hunch is we will see those who attack us begin to retreat.

Going To the Movies

Finishing With The Past

*"I am inclined to believe that God's chief purpose in giving us memory is to enable us to go back in time so that if we didn't play certain roles right the first time round, we can still have another go at it. We cannot undo our old mistakes or their consequences any more than we can erase old scars both suffered and inflicted. **But through the power that memory gives us of thinking, feeling, imagining our way back through time we can at long last finally finish with the past in the sense of removing its power to hurt and self sabotage our usefulness to God and to those we serve in His name.**"*

-Frederick Buechner

While reading the above mediation, I recalled a story I heard about Gary Player and the drill he used whenever he hit a poor shot. Rather than slamming the club in the bag and pouting with negative self talk as he walked down the fairway, he would take a practice swing and envision a perfectly executed shot.

My initial thought is replaying one golf shot is certainly not the same as replaying a life. However, as the Holy Spirit speaks to me, I realize that my mis-hits in life were not the result of a pure eternal focus. So if you can relate, we need to replay the mis-hits of life and see the success of our mis-hits from an eternal perspective remembering that our ways were not God's ways and He allowed the mis-hits. Fact is the only chance we now have of living up to par is taking another mulligan, putting the mis-hits behind us and using them to empower the lives of others for His glory and purpose while at the same time keeping on a path of humility.

Christ came to give us life abundant, to prosper and not to harm us, to give us hope and a future and we can do all things through Him who gives us strength, confident God will make a way.

Attached is a newly developed assessment around this topic entitled, "Finding Your Game, (Part 2)". Part 1 is also attached.

Golf and Life – Games That Owe Us Nothing

Disillusionment and spiritual bankruptcy mark our age. Many of us have cast aside old beliefs without acquiring new ones. Many men and women are creeping through life on their hands and knees, merely because they refuse to rely on any power but themselves. Many of them feel that they are being brave and independent, but actually they are flirting with disaster. Depression, anxiety and the inferiority complex have become the “*in*” conditions. Why is it that a loving God can allow bad things to happen is a popular question of many of these skeptics, and an excuse for these idealists who walk around with their entitled attitude? President Reagan and Pope John Paul II agreed that communism would fall not due to strategic but spiritual reasons. In one of their many secret meetings now revealed, John Paul told Reagan, “*Man relying on himself is like an elephant with legs of clay, it is impossible for him to hold up*”. Disillusionment and self reliance rob us of life. The doubting ones are the disillusioned ones. When you are in doubt, you spend your existence on the fence looking out for #1.

Gratitude on the other hand unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough...and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order and confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a failure into a success, the unexpected into perfect timing and mistakes into important events. It can turn an existence into a real life and disconnected situations into important and beneficial lessons. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace to today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

A life of disillusionment comes from a lack of gratitude for what one has because they feel they are entitled to more. What underlies this is a strong hidden feeling of inferiority based in fear. Let's take a look.

Fear is a powerful “*emotion*”. It arises when our brain senses danger. The manner in which we handle fear is a learned “*response*”. For instance, “*courage*” is not the opposite of fear but a chosen response to it. Therefore, anyone can choose to have courage and God tells us over and over, “*Be strong and Courageous*”. An acronym for fear used by some therapists and life coaches when it comes to fear is as follows...

False: Great golf course architects have mastered the art of setting up illusions on the golf course. If we buy into an illusion whether in life or golf, we remain on the fence and uncommitted. Lack of commitment in either game leads to poor execution.

Evidence: Due to the false evidence, we produce a “*tentative*” response to the illusion which allows us to cope with those wobbly legs of clay.

Appearing: The longer we remain trapped in the illusion the more real it appears.

Real: False reality inevitably leads to self sabotage which further complicates the true reality of the situation we feared from the start.

On the other hand is spiritual confusion which comes from not knowing God and not having an eternal view of life. Oh, we know much about God because in our churches today we are given one book after another about God and the newest hot topic. However, if you really know God you know that following God in life is a game of opposites just as golf is a game of opposites. Here are just a few examples...

- Jesus was born because the human race was dead to sin.
- Jesus then died for our sins in order that we would have life.
- Jesus told us that if we are to have life we must first give our lives up.
- Jesus said, *“The first shall be last and the last shall be first”*.

Disillusionment and spiritual bankruptcy keep us in quagmired illusion of endless fear as we find ourselves living a competition we can never win. When we live in fear consciously or unconsciously we function from a *“stayed”* existence and basically function as a still-born.

Writer’s Comments: For the record, this week’s tip was inspired after taking a rigorously honest look into my personal life and I found it to be extremely freeing. I pray you do to.

NEXT: “Most People Don’t Want The Responsibility That Comes With Being A Champion!”
“It Takes A Special Person.”

Golf and Life Fitness

We see it all the time. Tiger's knee, Freddie's back, Jack's hip? Once the injuries start, our games will never be quite the same again. If we're lucky we may be able to make some adjustments, but it still won't be the same.

Golf fitness experts tell us every day life in general, as well as the game of golf, creates imbalances in our body. For example, for most of us, the right side of our body will be the stronger side. Attaining muscle balance means that a training routine must be developed so our left side becomes just as strong as the right. In golf, this is critical since the non-dominant side of our body will deliver 80% of the power.

Hopefully this information makes the need for living a balanced life clearer. The order of our priorities in life is as follows...

1. God
2. Self
3. Spouse
4. Children
5. Mammon, (Work, Money, Success, etc.)

Even in life, 1 thru 4 above or 80% is where the power comes from in a fit life. Yet, there are still those who feel as though success leads to significance in life. Problem is waiting to reach a comfortable success or financial level first seldom works since just a little more will always be more comfortable.

Remember, "You can't worship both God and mammon".

This ends another season. The off season is the time to get in balanced shape for both games. That training begins the first week of December. We hope the life / golf tips spoke to you at times. A whole new season will begin the first week of March, 2012.

"Hit It Alice!"

If you're a golfer, you cringe at being labeled with this week's topic. But who the heck is Alice anyway? Here's some golf trivia for you.

The derogatory "*Alice*" label has been part of golf for decades. But who is Alice? And what did she do to get immortalized in a golf insult that frequently follows a putt that comes up short?

Contrary to what appears obvious, "*Alice*" isn't a she at all. "*Alice*" is a he, and it's not "*Alice*," its "*Alliss*", as in the famous British touring professional Peter Alliss.

The name that would go down in golf infamy actually began at the 1963 Ryder Cup in Atlanta. Alliss played Arnold Palmer and the late "*Champagne*" Tony Lema in back-to-back singles matches and won 1.5 points, halving with Lema and beating Palmer. At some point during his match against Palmer, Alliss for whom putting was not a strength badly missed a 3-foot putt. Someone in the gallery yelled out, "*Nice putt, Alliss!*" and the phrase became part of the golf lexicon. The BBC, then played a large part in burning the phrase into the public consciousness.

Most golfers, that is most golfers outside of Britain, have no idea that "*Alice*" is actually Peter Alliss. But now you do. Back to the tip!

Christianity seems to be coming up short today at a time when the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be communicated in a practical and authentic manner more than ever. The focus seems to be more on ministry survival rather than the survival of souls through transparent life-on-life experience. The "*build it and they will come*" strategy of the roaring 90's seems to have many churches more budget than faith conscious. And in far too many cases, friendship evangelism is being taken to the extreme in order to not offend those already in the pews.

Deceleration (*the "Alice" stroke*) in putting is caused by the golfer taking the putter back from the ball at a faster pace than the forward stroke resulting in a putt with little on it. The formula for deceleration is; lack of commitment to a crucial putt + uncertainty of focus on the line + lack of belief in our method with a crucial putt = "*Hit it Alice!*" In life de-celerating occurs during those crucial seasons when we eventually seize our lives back from God and get back in control. It's a result of lack of commitment to God's completion in our life, uncertainty that He really has our backs and just plain lack of faith. Unfortunately, this "*Hit It Alice*" is no joke.

The next time we're listening to a message and the preacher or speaker is waffling around a topic or is stuck in political correctness, someone listening should shout out "*Hit It Alice*". After all, no preacher or speaker has a problem with a hearty, Amen! In fact, a speaker looks for one and many times will coach their listeners into giving them one.

It's time we get the grit to look Ole Slick square in the eyes with the greatest story of good news ever told and boldly say, "*Alice Doesn't Live - Here – Anymore*".

Hitting Out Of Trouble

Ok, we've all done it. The ball is in the rough and there's a five foot opening between two trees. You aim carefully, keep your head still, you hit it flush and it goes smack into the center of one of the trees (most likely the tree on the left), and the impact echo's like a nuclear explosion. Best yet, you weren't even aiming there.

Remember our last tip, *"Something We Was Born With"*? Now that you've found your swing remember this the next time you're faced with that five foot opening.

Don't approach it with your margin of error at 100% by trying to split the uprights. Instead, decrease your margin of error to 50%. Aim at the tree to the right of the opening. Why, because the clubface tends to rollover when hitting from the rough. Oh yeah, pray!

So, the next time you're hitting out of trouble, decrease your margin of error, survey your options, always play to your strength, and as Ben Hogan said, "pick your mistake". This is also a valuable strategy in everyday life.

When you find yourself under stress in life, decrease your margin of error, determine your options, play to your strength and pick your mistake. Oh yeah, pray!

Hybrids, Should They Be Outlawed?

Some of the pros on the Champions Tour have said in jest that hybrid clubs should be illegal since they are so easy to hit that using them should be considered cheating. But why? There have been advancements in golf equipment since the game's inception.

Some years ago, I was playing in a tournament where I witnessed a golfer who couldn't even win cheating. This particular event was being scored using the callaway system. Under the callaway system a certain number of holes are deducted based on the player's total score in order to create a handicap. However, two of the eighteen holes (usually 17 and 18 if the event is not a "blind" callaway), are not deducted to keep it fair. In a blind callaway however, only the scorer knows the two holes that will not be deducted.

So, in this particular event one golfer thought he had figured out a way to beat this scoring system. Obviously not understanding the system, he tees up on 18 and intentionally fires 3 balls out of bounds figuring when the hole was deducted he would win. When he finished, the scorer informed him the two holes not being deducted were 17 and 18. So this champ ended up finishing dead last.

Winning on the course or in everyday life has all to do with what you're made of inside and where you draw your discipline and perseverance from. Learning to beat the system and all the latest innovations or trends will mean little if we fold and don't go the distance and miss the opportunity when we breathe our last to say, "It is finished."

Here's some inner coaching. "In this world we will have trouble, but fear not, God has overcome this world."

"I Hope My Putting Isn't Disturbing Your Conversation!"

Golf is a game of etiquette, very much the way life once was. One of the first pointers a new golfer learns is to be quiet when another golfer is hitting the golf ball or they may hear the word "*Fore*" gently said to them – most times. Or, if another golfer really wants to teach a new golfer they may say for instance while trying to putt, "*I Hope My Putting Isn't Disturbing Your Conversation!*"

"Fore" is another word for *"ahead"* (think of a ship's *fore and aft*). *"Fore"* is simply a shorter way to communicate *"watch out ahead"* (or *"watch out before"* or *"quiet please"*). It allows golfers to be forewarned, in other words. The British Golf Museum cites an 1881 reference to *"fore"* in a golf book, establishing that the term was already in use at that early date. The USGA suggests the term may have been in use as early as the 1700's. The museum also surmises that the term evolved from *"forecaddie"* - *one who goes ahead*. So much for the trivia.

Here at Game of Life we take seriously those things we are dependent on outside of God. As a trained life coach, an indicator of person caught up in a dependency outside of godly surrender is self absorption. Why is this? We have decided to play God leaving Him floating around the periphery of life rather than in the center. At Game of Life our theology tells us we all possess a dependent nature. Should you debate this ask yourself, *"why is there a Christ"*? After all, wasn't it the creation plan that we were to be totally dependent on God until our eyes were opened and we were sold on the caption of independence?

F.O.R.E. at Game of Life Foundation stands for **Fellowship Offers Refuge and Encouragement**. It's here we discover and learn to take seriously those glaring dependencies in our lives that are causing us to be the god of our lives rather than being totally dependent on the On True God. While our dependencies many times are not evident to us, you can bet they are to others. Then, rather than call us on it with a gentle F.O.R.E. (*meaning we can use some fellowship*), they will say nothing which eventually leads to resentment and conflict.

The most popular use of the word *"Fore"* is when it is yelled out as a ball is heading for another golfer. If you've ever observed, when two golfers are standing near to each other upon hearing the alert, they will instinctively shield each other. In life we shield each other through **Fellowship that Offers Refuge and Encouragement** with those who can keep us accountable and out of our heads keeping us in peak performance for both games.

"If I Could Just Hit the Ball with My Practice Swing!"

Over many years of teaching, I have heard this week's topic said hundreds of times. So, why is this? Let's take a look.

In other sports there is a natural action / reaction reflex because the object of focus is in motion. However in golf, when we step up to that little white ball and it stares us down, it paralyzes the most powerful of over-achievers and "natural" athletes.

So then, why is that our practice swings are so good? It's actually simple; we're not concerned about power which allows us to swing in balance when we take a practice swing.

The key to a successful golf shot is the same as the key to a successful life...Balance! In either game, when we're off balance in our quest for power, the result is we stray and in some cases we are penalized severely.

The secret to perfect balance in both games is quiet knees. On the course we flex them, in life we genuflect on them, and we keep kneeling in order that humility maintains its life-saving priority. Without humility, both games will devour us.

I can go on and on, and it wouldn't be in jest, but the following poem says it best.

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The Ball

On the tee I see "The Ball",
White and dimpled, rather small.

Oh, how bland it does appear,
This harmless looking little sphere.

By its size I would not guess
The awesome power it does possess;

But since I fell beneath its spell
I've wandered through the fires of Hell.

My life has not been quite the same
Since I chose to play this maddening game.

It rules my life for hours on end.
A small fortune it has made me spend.

It has made me curse and cry.
To the point I hated myself and wanted to die.

It promises a thing called "par"

If I can just hit it straight and far.

To master such a tiny ball
Should not be very hard at all.

But my desire for power the ball refuses
And does exactly as it chooses.

It hooks, slices, dribbles and just short of the hole dies,
And even disappears right before my very eyes.

Often it will even have a whim
To hit a tree or take a swim.

With miles of grass on which to land
How it seems to find those patches of sand,

Then it has me offering up my soul
If it will only drop in that little hole.

It's made me whimper like a pup,
And swear that I will give it up

As I take to drink to ease my sorrow.

"The Ball" knows...I'll be back tomorrow.

"Just Do It!"

In sports, when an athlete is off their game for a period, it's gets labeled "*a slump*". In life when we're off our game for a period of time, it gets labeled "*depression or burnout*".

What's a cause of this? One thing for certain is over-thinking. Instead of "*Keeping It Simple*", complexity comes into play, and when complexity comes in, the pressure to play God and create a magic solution becomes so overwhelming that we become overwhelmed and crash. Another cause in both games is we take shortcuts when correction is needed, especially if the correction is hard or uncomfortable. Then we find ourselves on what seems like a merry-go-round. Things get better for a bit then its back to the same old thing. James 1 tells us, "*We must be 'COMPLETE' – then will be lacking in nothing*". However, that completion is only for those who are willing to do the things the vast majority are not.

On the PGA Tour today, guys like Tiger and Phil travel with an entourage of instructors around them. They have a new swing nearly every tournament. In my opinion the biggest tragedy is Ernie Els. Here's arguably the most natural swinger of the golf club since Sam Snead. Winner of 2 U.S. and 1 British Open, and its painful for me to watch him address the ball today he's become so mechanical. What a tragedy!

What's the solution? Nike has it. ***"Just Do It!"*** There's no magic. We just have to trust and Stay in the Present. Wow! That's profound. Tell me something new. Let me share something that God revealed to me recently.

Recently I've been experiencing just an onslaught of fear and anxiety. Then the other day I thought about a situation I faced many years ago, and if there was ever cause for fear and anxiety, this was it. Yet, I experienced that peace that passes all understanding.

Then God spoke to me and said, "*During that time I was your shield, your protector and your peace. Today you come to me for help to find that shield, protection and peace. Keep It Simple...Trust. You've gotten too complex and have caused a problem that isn't even there. Do what is clearly at hand and seek my Kingdom. You have my Word I will make a way and direct your path.*"

"Just Do It!" Pretty profound - Ya think?

"Most People Don't Want The Responsibility That Comes With Being A Champion!"

"It Takes a Special Person"

When I heard Golf Channel commentator and former tour professional David Feherty come out with this week's topic, man did a light go on in me. For many years now I have felt with conviction that my sole competitive win took everything I had out of me. Now I realize why that was.

Aside from an intense practice regimen which I committed to, came a much deeper responsibility that I chose not to embrace. Looking back, I wonder now if the practice wasn't more a form of isolation because I didn't want the responsibility that came with being a real champion.

A real champion loses their life doing service work. Real champions have no private life - or do they? A real champion not only loses their life doing service work, but they are the same person in private that they are in public. I think that's the part that takes a special person.

Most people today want the status, notoriety, success and money that comes from being a champion, but their private world is a fraud. Outside this champion's locker room it's all lights and cheers, while inside it's chaos because they know there is something missing.

A true champion lives a "*wholly*" life. They know we are all living today on borrowed time solely by the grace of God sending His Son to give us the most valuable mulligan we can ever receive. The champion that accepts the responsibility must be a "*whole*" person whose life training regimen balances the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Spiritual, Social and Financial components of their lives. The champion that accepts the responsibility works hard at their jobs, not because of the high, sense of prestige or quest to fill a void, but because they are using their God-given gifts to benefit others.

"Never Up - Never In!"

Another popular expression one will often hear during a round of golf when a golfer misjudges the distance on a long putt is, *"Never Up - Never In!"*. However, that isn't the same and nearly as demoralizing as when a hearty *"Hit It Alice!"* Sound off.

The outstanding trait of a great putter is they simply believe they can putt. Great putters approach putting on the offense displaying shock when they miss no matter what the distance. Great putters are not afraid to miss because they give up control of the speed of the putt and focus on the line.

Champions in life simply believe all is going to be well. They approach life with confidence (*on the offensive*), because they draw their power outside themselves. Champions in life look to produce results; they have quit the outcome business which gives them the courage not to be afraid to make a mistake since even mistakes have a purpose. Fear of making a mistake due to pride sets in when we lose power and focus. Whether on the course or in everyday life, *"Never Up - Never In"* has all to do with fear and playing defensively. It has nothing to do with method, rather, we put our focus on the wrong thing.

On the course we focus too much on the speed of the putt rather than the path the putt needs to travel on. In life we also get caught up in the speed of things rather than focusing on the *"Path"* we must go, knowing we have been given a GUARANTEE, *"God Will Make Our Path Straight"*.

Following is a great swing thought for on and off the course...

*"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will NEVER leave you or forsake you. Do not be afraid or discouraged, **FOR THE BATTLE IS NOT YOURS, BUT GOD'S.**"*

Deuteronomy 30 & 31

"No Pain - No Gain!"

"No Pain - No Gain!" Is that expression a thing of the past, or still a fact of life? Let's take a look.

Today's psychologists and many of the *"left coast"* educators are suggesting making changes to some of America's favorite past times. Such changes as renaming Dodge Ball to Circle of Friends. Doesn't that sound like fun? Today, everybody wins in sport and is automatically on the team, and in some cases, everyone gets a trophy at the end of the season, all in the quest to protect the self esteem of today's fragile youth. Fact is in this world we will have trouble, challenges and yes - disappointments, and if our self esteem has become this fragile, where will we be as a nation in the future?

I will admit, I'm cracking up writing this tip remembering some of the spectacular Dodge Ball hits that cut some of our legs out on a tar, yes tar, school playground. While I know this may come as a shock, we did live and didn't slit our wrists. We got up, cleaned off pants and cut the legs out of another kid.

Is this protection of self esteem preparing today's youth for the way life really works? For some time now I've had James 1 on my mind and what it means to be *"complete and lacking in nothing"*.

After playing golf three days in a row a couple of weeks ago and accepting the fact that the old golf muscles just ain't what they used to be, the fourth morning, I couldn't move. I hurt from head to toe. However, during this experience, I discovered what it took to be *"complete"*.

My first thought was it will be a while before I get out on the course again. But then I realized that I could play through the pain, re-develop those old muscles and get back in golf shape (*complete if you will*), rather than masking the pain with Vitamin A for Advil as many guys my age refer to it. There's no debate here, *"No Pain - No Gain!"*

Pre-Shot Routine

Satan, The Devil, Lucifer, does he actually roam our world today? When polled, an overwhelming number of people felt the thought of a devil was fictitious, a Disney like character. Yet, when Saddam Hussein was killed an overwhelming number of people polled felt he was in hell. How could this be?

This "*fictitious, Disney-like*" devil just happens to be sitting on a huge lead as he deceptively coasts to an easy victory in "*The Battlefield of the Mind Classic*" over a course where the names of Jesus, Jesus Christ, or just plain Christ has become accepted as a means of releasing pressure.

A Pre-Shot Routine in golf is a *systematic* and *consistent* (two very key words), sequence of thoughts and checkpoints that is executed by a golfer prior to hitting a golf shot. A Pre-Shot Routine assists a golfer in keeping rhythm and focus. Does your Pre-Day Routing assist you in keeping rhythm and focus? Is it as *systematic* and *consistent* as brushing your teeth in the morning?

The main reason many of us are in the back of the pack in "*The Battlefield of the Mind Classic*", is we have lost our rhythm and focus in life and are games are filled with inconsistencies. We're playing life outside of God's design for living thinking we're bullet proof because we have deceptively subscribed to the gospel according to "*me*".

Following is a systematic and consistent sequence of thoughts and checkpoints to be applied to everyday life using the acronym **H.A.L.T.**

Hungry: While proper nutrition is important for our performance both on and off the course, we are made for community. We also hunger for attention, comfort, understanding, approval, love, companionship, etc. Most important, our hearts and souls need food, and God's word is food for the heart and soul.

Solution: *Community, God's Word*

Angry: This is a bit more complex and the solution is much more challenging. Anger is normal to a degree unless it is turned against ourselves or others. When it turns into a repeated loop, **that's resentment**, and that's very serious since begins to eat at our spirit and turns into righteous bitterness which eventually destroys us.

Solution: *Pray sincerely for the person, place or things you are angry about. If prayer doesn't work, seek professional help. This could be as difficult as finding a golf ball in the heavy rough, and we all know how difficult that is without help.*

Lonely: While similar to hunger, loneliness usually stems from isolation fine tuned as a child as a survival mechanism. Loneliness has difficulty reaching out.

Solution: *Stop isolating and begin insulating through God's Word, small groups and accountable relationships. If loneliness continues to be a frequent companion, it is most likely a clinical issue and requires professional attention.*

Tired: Tiredness, Burnout, Overload, Taking on Too Much in an attempt to fill our voids, while most prevalent, accepted and expected these symptoms are the most ignored and carries with them the most bullet proof and dangerous of attitudes today.

Solution: *Attempt to prioritize and balance your life. If you are unable to do so, first seek the training of a life coach. If you are still unsuccessful, you may need to seek clinical help since excessive busyness is a numbing mechanism via “action” rather than numbing through the “ingestion” of food or some other substance.*

What a perfect time to H.A.L.T. during the aftermath of Hurricane Irene. Some of us who went without power for a week should have learned volumes about our mental games. I certainly did! I learned the wind is not only the top contender we face on the course, but for me it's my #1 in life also. As the week went on and my schedule was limited due to lack of electricity cause by the wind, my compulsion to control life was getting unnerving. I came to the realization that my private world needs much time on the practice tee and the quality of my trust in God under pressure is right on the cut line.

Whether on the course or in life the elements are there to show us whose boss and how little control we actually have in either game. Real champions master the basics which allows them to keep a piercing focus and winning attitude both on and off the course.

Always keep in mind; we can H.A.L.T. and restart our attitudes any time during a round or day.

Attached is a H.A.L.T. Assessment for you use. Pass it on!

Something We Was Born With...

"Inside each and every one of us is our one true authentic swing. Something we was born with. Something that's ours and ours alone. Something that can't be learned...something that's got to be remembered." Bagger Vance

Have you found your one true authentic swing? *"The one you was born with?"* Or are you playing life trying to be someone you're not in order measure up to a social or business environment, or someone else's expectations, and you're wondering why your life is a bit unmanageable - as I was?

Sam Snead is said to have had the prettiest golf swing while Byron Nelson the most perfect swing. Certainly Miller Barber and Jim Furyk have the strangest golf swings. But the key to each of these players is their ability to consistently deliver the club face squarely against the back of the ball at impact.

An "ah ha" moment came to me just recently when reading My Utmost for His Highest, (January 26 & 27). The two readings came from The Sermon On The Mount where Jesus speaks of worry and the *"much more"* He promises us if we stop our torturous dependence on worry.

The revelation He gave me is I never have to worry if my life is authentic. These last three years I spent swinging at life with a swing that wasn't mine. I've come to refer to it as my Fernando Lamas swing. My ego convinced me that it was better to *"look marvelous than feel marvelous"* while getting high off a false image that was building me up while I was down. But life is meant to be simple if we play it with the *"something we was born with."*

Praise God we are given infinite mulligans both on and off the course. Please pray as I return to being His ghost writer with these tips and begin to re-direct this ministry with the gift of His new found wisdom. It's time to get back to playing life squarely and consistently *"with the something I was born with"* - **Serving (caddying for) others.**

Following are the words from Oswald Chambers that opened my heart. *"Many of us refuse to grow where God plants us. Therefore, we don't take root anywhere."*

Staying In the Present II

There's an saying, *"Worry and Anxiety are like a rocking chair, they will give you something to do but they won't get you anywhere"*.

"Staying in the Present" is critical if we are going to successfully compete on the course or in life. Jesus tells us *"live for today and tomorrow will take care of itself"*. A key expression of the recovery movement is, *"One Day at a Time"*. So why is *"Staying in the Present"* so critical for both games?

C.S. Lewis wrote, *"The 'Present' is the point at which time touches 'Eternity'"*. Let me repeat that. *"The 'Present' is the point at which time touches 'Eternity'"*. What does this mean?

Of the present moment (and only of the present moment), as humans we have an experience which corresponds to the experience God has of reality as a whole. In it alone freedom and a peaceful state of existence are offered us. When out of the present on the course, we will many times hit the exact shot we fear, and when out of the present in life many times we will unconsciously self sabotage ourselves. In both cases when our compulsion to control takes over we typically fold.

So when we find ourselves worried and anxious in either game, first we must develop an un-wavering belief / trust in our Method. In life this means an un-wavering belief / trust in *"Who" and "Whose"* you are. It's critical to start by asking yourself the following...

- What do I believe?
- Why do you believe it?

There can be no middle ground. God is either who He says He is or not. If He is in your life, believe / trust in Him **without limitation** and get in that Present zone.

The Power of a Father

Since 1965 the U.S. Open has ended on Father's Day. During that era Arnold spoke with such reverence about his father Deacon as did Jack about his dad Charlie.

Who could ever forget as Tiger walked off the 18th green at the 1997 Masters and embraced his father? That year's tournament was one for the record books in many ways. The most historic part of this achievement was that a black man won a tournament that blacks were not even allowed to play in prior to 1969 I believe, no matter what their ranking. The embrace yesterday between Rory McIlroy and his dad carried with it not only the love between a son and his father, but the sacrifice made by a father and mother from Northern Ireland who dedicated their lives to their son who obviously was given a gift from God.

NBC sports announcer and former U.S. and British open champion Johnny Miller (whose commentary makes me nuts to the point where I sometimes turn off the sound on the TV); made the comment yesterday, *"there is no higher calling than being a father"*. Well said Johnny! Working in men's ministry these last 15 years, I've both observed and experienced the power of a father and the little boy admiration of grown men when they speak of their hero.

For me it happened in 1979 when I was nearing the end of my competitive golf career. I was about to play in a 54 hole tournament named after former NBA commissioner J. Walter Kennedy. Shortly before this, my father had a second heart attack. At the time my golf game was the best it ever was and I had never won a tournament of the magnitude I would be playing in.

Being in fear that my father might not be around very much longer, I set a goal to win the tournament for him, and I never looked back. I led all three rounds never touching a sand trap and when I sunk the winning put even with all the people around the 18th green I heard *"that a boy"* and spotted my father in the crowd like he was the only one there lit up like a Christmas tree. Fortunately I would have many more years with my father who died just four years ago at 83. My biggest victory that day was knowing he really was proud of me. Today I am blessed to have as my spiritual father Pastor Derek Calhoun who I'm trying to convince to change his last name to Calhounio, since when he preaches he talks with his hands so much I figure he's gotta have some Italian blood.

What a game. Lee Trevino who never knew his father credits Jack Nicklaus as being his example on how to be a dad. Comedian George Lopez was quoted as saying, *"golf is a game that taught me the things about life that the father I never knew should have taught me"*.

What a life. We have a Heavenly Father who Jesus and Paul referred to as *"Abba"*, an Aramaic word indicating their intimacy with their Heavenly Father.

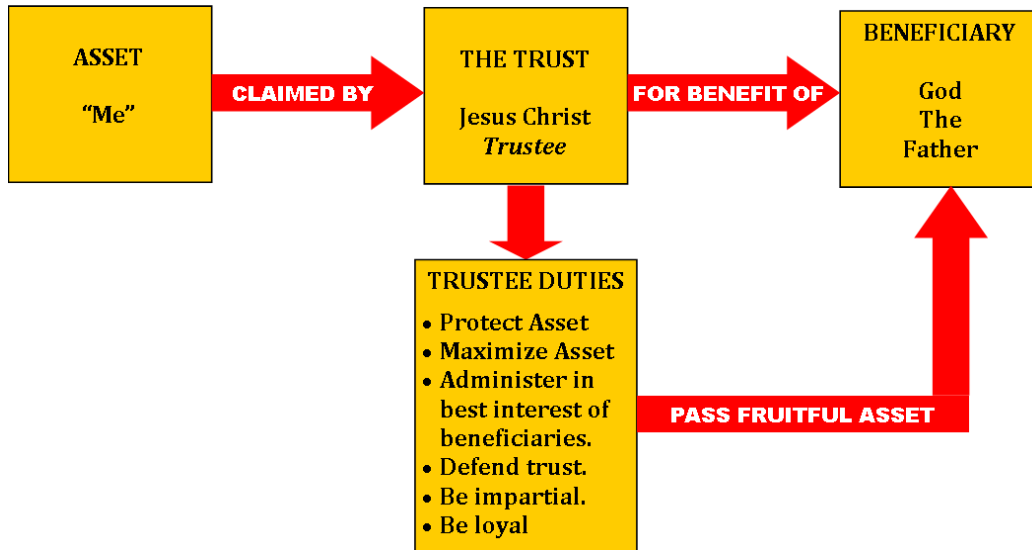
So no matter where you find your relationship today with your earthly father, make it better or make an amends before it's too late. If you love your Heavenly Father, love Him more. If you're estranged or don't know Him, remember something, no matter what you may be

harboring, His love only increases for you and He awaits your homecoming with outstretched arms.

Men, if you believe that fatherhood is in fact a *"higher calling"*, then answer your Heavenly Father's call and walk closely with him. Find someone you can trust (I am available), and share your past hurts and resentments. Keep in mind, *"A Calling is to be named or chosen"*. Remember what God said to us through Jesus, *"You Did Not Choose Me - But I Chose You"*.

Take His Hand Today. Please!!!

Turning a Weakness into a Strength



One of the most encouraging facts of life and golf is that our weakness can become our greatest asset. Airplanes rise against the wind. In climbing a mountain, we need the stony and rough places to aid us in our climb. However, our weakness can only become an asset if we face it, fearlessly examine it, and get down to the root of our weakness. Problem is it is easier for us to remain in a safe place making excuses, saying *"I Can't"* or thinking our situation is unique, or go into denial. Problem is either of those choices will only awaken the unconscious competence we all possess to further self sabotage ourselves.

Golfing great's Lee Trevino, Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson each turned swing flaws into assets and are known as the greatest strikers of the golf ball the game as ever seen. Accomplishing this took hours of work digging thousands of balls out of the dirt.

So let's start digging at those weaknesses...

Maintain Perspective

1. Due to our sin natures, we are living on borrowed time.
2. We are alive today only because of the grace of God.
3. What time we have left we owe to God...not ourselves.
4. Our lives from now on are not our own, and have been put in a trust for God's glory through the death of Christ.

Once you have gained perspective, it's time to dig into the dirt and get at the root of your weakness, (*"Dirt" being your fears, secrets, deceptions, defenses, etc.*) and you will be set free to fulfill Christ's mission for saving you, *"so you will have life and have it to the fullest"*.

Waiting In Between Shots

One of the things that throw golfers off their games is waiting in between shots. I've played with more than one golfer who was enjoying a nice round, when they had to wait on a shot, and then hit that shot like their twin brother showed up and hit it for them.

Next time you're waiting in between shots, or you're in a traffic jam for that matter and you're already running late, apply the following...

Waiting on the Course

1. Leave the club in the bag. If you have a club in hand while waiting, you are bound to half commit to the shot.
2. Distract yourself by talking to your playing partners.
3. If you're in competition pick two to three trees and move your eyes back and forth in a stare to remain in the present.

Waiting in Life

1. Pray for that person you told you would pray for since it was the right thing to say at the moment.
2. Maintain Perspective in a waiting situation by remembering there's someone out there today whose blood was boiling because they were in a traffic jam the morning of 9/11/2001 and they're alive today.

Always remember, whether it's in life or golf, our competitor is not a situation or another person, but as Sam Snead put it, "It's what goes on between our two ears".

So, whether it's in sport or life, the psychology is as follows...

- Maintain Perspective
- Stay in the Present
- Believe In Your Method
- Apply Mental Toughness
- Inner Coaching / Self Talk
- Pre-Shot / Pre-Day Mindset

Youth and Fear vs Experience and Fear

When one thinks of a fearless competitor on the golf course the name of a young Arnold Palmer has to be at the top of the list. *"The Charger"*, *"Arnie's Army"* and if you're a golf fanatic as I am, who can forget the final round of the 1960 U.S. Open at Cherry Hills.

Palmer 7 shots back starting the final round tees up on the tricky 313 yard first hole, hitches up his pants in that Palmer fashion, pulls out his driver like a warrior pulling out his sword for battle, then proceeds to defy the hole's design by knocking his tee shot on the green electrifying the gallery as he begins his charge to an amazing victory. Why is it as youngsters we're fearless and bold and as we get older, the knees start shaking both on and off the course? Let's explore this.

Psychologists tell us that when we're young we are fearless because we are not conscious of the possible consequences. That certainly is logical. On the other hand, God tells us in His Word we're to have the faith / belief of a child. Hmm!

This morning as I write this tip my anxiety level is on the high side to say the least. Knowing full well how God has stooped in the past to help me, I sit here believing God just can't do it for me this time. The more I analyze the more paralyzed I become.

In sport, the paralysis of analysis leads to a slump. In life we call it depression, stress, anxiety, burnout etc.

Following are some child-like thoughts to help you keep life simple - that is if you really believe them. If your *"Doubting Thomas"* side is lurking about, ponder the following two questions...

1. Do I know what I REALLY believe?
2. Why do I believe what I believe?

* If you're struggling with the above, and/or the following do not bring you to a child-like faith and peace of mind, you should [CLICK HERE](#)

- Be Still and Know That I Am God
- God Will Make A Way.
- All Is Going To Be Well.
- I Can't, He Can, And Will...If I Let Him.
- I Know From Experience That As Time Goes On The Future Takes Care Of Itself.
- God Is My Refuge and Strength, An Ever Present Help In Times Of Trouble.
- While My Ways Are Not Your Ways, I Will NEVER Leave You Nor Forsake You.
- God's Love Will Never Fail Me. "Perfect Love Casts Out ALL Fear"

Rabbi and the Monkey

Two men were flying on the same plane. One was a famous humanist, a naturalist, the other a famous rabbi. Both of them were flying with their sons. The humanist's son was very disrespectful toward his father whereas the rabbi's son was kind and attentive, waiting on his father and anticipating his father's every need and request. As his son derided him, at last the humanist could tolerate it no longer and he asked the rabbi, *"What's the difference between us that your son treats you with such respect and mine treats me with such disrespect?"* The rabbi explained, *"I am one generation older than my son. That means that I am one generation closer to Adam, the first man, the original creation made in the image of God. So my son respects me because I am closer to the original model of the image of God than he is. But you say you don't really take God seriously and that it's possible that people could have evolved from monkeys, therefore, to your son, you are one generation closer to a monkey than he is, so why should he respect you?"*

Are You Over-Coached?

During a P.G.A. Tour event, CBS sports announcer Jim Nantz made the following comment. *"It's becoming almost impossible today to get an honest interview because the players are all so over-coached by the sport psychologists."*

A number of years back, I assisted a priest friend in his doctorate in pastoral ministry studies. As part of a leadership course he was taking, he studied the different leadership styles of 4 presidents, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy. This was being done in an effort for the course participants to discover their leadership styles so when asked, *"Who Are You?"* they were clear.

Is it just me, or do many people today seem programmed? There are the power cars, buzz sayings and people act and talk the same. Without a doubt the thing that gets my goat is when asked a question the person being interviewed responds, *"I think this is what you're trying to say"*.

Today we have become a society of Humans Doing vs Humans Being and I know this trap all too well. For many of us, life has become a Ground Hog Day of sorts. However, if conducted properly, life coaching helps someone *"Get A Life"* that has rhythm and balance to it. It's not just about becoming successful.

Remember what Bagger Vance said so eloquently. *" Inside each and every one of us is one true authentic swing... Somethin' we was born with... Somethin' that's ours and ours alone... Somethin' that can't be taught to ya or learned... Somethin' that got to be remembered... Over time the world can, rob us of that swing... It get buried inside us under all our wouldas and couldas and shouldas... Some folk even forget what their swing was like..."*

In golf we discover *"Who We Are"* by how we respond to the basics. In life we must first discover *"Whose We Are"* by answering 2 questions:

- * What do I believe?
- * Why do I believe it?

Being crystal clear of the answers to the 2 previous questions, we will discover *"Who We Are"* which will determine our basics for living and how we respond to life. Competitive golfers know their blind spots when the heat mounts and it's just as critical to know them in life.

Coming Down To the Wire in Life and Golf – What Are You Made Of?

When his game is on as it was in last week's Memorial Tournament, Tiger plays a golf tournament like a horse runs a race. First round he will be in the middle of the field. Second round known as "*moving day*", he will make his move up the leader board. Third round he will gain the lead, and coming down to the wire on Sunday there's no one better. He's Baaack!?

As I travel around golf circles, I watch the young golfers. They have all the mannerisms of the pros. They wear and play with the top equipment. However, they will never know what they're really made of until their tested in competition coming down to the wire. From what I've observed over the last fifteen years in ministry, coming down to the wire is the biggest most important test we will ever be faced with in life, and it will without question show what we're made of.

Let me divert for a confession. While out for a social round of golf with 2 buddies, we were grouped with one of those youngsters, or "*flat bellies*" as the senior golfers refer to them. After he out drove my best by 20 yards for the third time, I asked him his age. He told me he was 15. Well, as the saying goes, "*old habits die hard*". I proceed to go right into his head and watch him fold and he never knew what happened. Thank God our mulligans in life are endless due to God's grace.

Let's do a very quick bible study. We're told that when Adam and Eve realized they were naked, they covered up. Human beings have been covering up with "*stuff*", "*things*" and other "*substances*" ever since. Why, to fill our Separation Idolatry Neurosis, **S.I.N.**

If a golfer who wants to excel competitively covers up the flawed parts of their game rather than digging them out of the dirt, they **WILL** fold when they find themselves coming down to the wire.

In life the statistics tell us we will live to 80 or so. If we do there is only a 10% chance we will be lucky enough to die suddenly and a 90% chance we will find ourselves living in a Ground Hog Day cognitively impaired. And, if we haven't gotten down to our personal flaws and we are tested, we will no longer have the cognizance to cover up, and we **WILL** fold right in front of our most important gallery, - Those we love most. Revealing to those we love and may have admired us "*who we really are*" as we are coming down to the wire in life, will be an awful legacy to leave, and all the clever financial and tax planning we've done will tragically end up being another salve that will be used by our loved ones as they continue to use "*stuff*", "*things*" and other "*substances*" to cover up their deep disappointment.

There's a saying in the financial sales industry that, "The difference between an old man and an elderly gentleman – is money". My experience has shown me that the difference between an old man and an elderly gentleman – is integrity.

Forgiveness in Golf

I guess it began with Karsten Solheim, a Norwegian born engineer who started The Ping Golf Company. Remembering very well how golfers were resistant of the dramatic shift of the Ping design, the fact that they were designed to be more forgiving (easier to hit), eventually won the golf world over.

Today's club design shift however has moved to power. A good player fitted with the proper equipment *and ball* will definitely gain power. Yet, for today's average golfers, the ball striking improvement gained through today's power technology pales in comparison to the ball striking improvement experienced through that of the forgiveness Ping introduced.

In life as in golf, having power put in your hands doesn't mean you will be more powerful. Gaining power or the quest for power has brought down many in both games. On the other hand, forgiveness in both games may not increase power, but it will add peace and joy to both games.

My guess would be the several thousand golfers and non golfers alike reading this tip have heard the expression, *"Some guys have all the luck"*. When you are too closely examine that expression there seems to be more truth to it than might be expected. Looking back on my experience in competitive golf, certain guys really did seem to get all the breaks. In hindsight these were the guys that brought their gracious everyday spirit to the course. These were the guys that also seemed to enjoy the greatest longevity in both games. The hard-chargers with the power seemed to fade early. Hmm! Now that it dawns on me, the 2 oldest major winners were Jack Nicklaus at 46 and Julius Boros at 48. Both these golfing greats had the reputation of being laid-back.

Over the years now, many of these tips have come out of my own life. Right now both of my games are far from in peak shape. I attribute it to age and those few extra pounds. But as I write this I wonder, *"Is my current condition a result of what I've been eating for 59 years - or what's been eating me"*? How about you?

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." **Ephesians 6:12 New International Version 1984 (NIV1984)**

Grip It Firmer From the Tall Grass

As always, this year's US Open was much like the rest. In fact, this year the tall grass or the rough as it's also known as became more of a factor for many players than did the greens.

When hitting from the tall grass, the shot is approached as follows:

1. Grip the club firmer. Note I didn't say tighter. Firm is when the palms apply more firmness to the grip. Not the fingers. Why? Gripping the club in this manner tends to fan the club open at impact since the tall grass tends to close the clubface.
2. Choke down on the grip about an inch. This will add to the stability required at impact.
3. Shorten the swing. This is not accomplished by consciously trying to shorten the back swing. Here's a valuable trick. As you approach the shot, grab a small piece of your shirt under your left arm and lightly squeeze it into the left side of your chest. This will restrict your backswing - vice versa if you are a lefty.
4. Be patient and focus on execution - not outcome.

You know it's exactly the same when we hit life's rough spots. Unfortunately, too many times our first reaction is to tighten up and try to control what we have absolutely no control of - the outcome.

When in life's rough spots:

1. "Believe In Your Method" and grip or embrace the situation firmly.
2. Focus on the execution of that which is clearly at hand.
3. Get accountable. This will restrict our compulsive nature to control.
4. Being patient and accountable will keep you focused and out of the outcome allowing God to do for us what we can't do alone.

Grip Pressure Determines Rhythm

In 1973 at the ripe old age of 20, I attended a PGA Educational Forum at the Westchester Country Club in Harrison, NY. The keynote speaker was Sam Snead. He spoke on and then took questions for 2 hours on the grip. Snead taught how to control ball flight by applying pressure with certain fingers. For Snead, his fingers touched the grip as if he were playing a flute. This man's talent was off the chart. The saying he repeated several times was, *"the tighter you grip it, the more crooked you'll rip it"*. He told us **"Grip Pressure Determines Rhythm"** and no player had Snead's rhythm. Snead believed a golfer should grip the club very lightly. When asked how important he thought the grip was in relation to other parts of the swing, Snead replied, *"It's everything"*. Yet, the vast majority of golfers grip the club improperly.

So let me ask you, how are you gripping your life today? Nice and lightly and your living life in a rhythm and balance? Or are you gripping it so tightly your knuckles are white and you're all over the place trying to find direction? The change to the correct grip on the golf club is uncomfortable and it actually feels like you have less control, stick with it though and your game will go to a whole new level with added power and consistency.

When we make the decision to turn our wills and our lives over and to live In His Grip, it will be very uncomfortable and the lack of power you will feel will be terrifying. But stick to it and grip it easy. The rhythm of life combined with a dramatic increase in power and accuracy is sure to change your life as you discover God is doing for you what you couldn't do alone.

Hitting From the Water

As kids we've probably all had the experience of diving in a pool for pennies. One of the first things that stands out is the coins appear to be closer to the top of the water than they actually are.

Under the rules of golf, water is considered to be a *"hazard"* no different than a sand trap or bunker. What that means is a golfer may not ground the club when hitting from water nor may they move any *"fixed"* objects such as rocks or various types of growth. The shot is then played similar to a bunker shot that is of course if you can get past the illusion of the ball's depth in the water. Unless the cause far outweighs the risk, the prudent move is to pick up the ball and take a penalty shot.

In life we face hazards all the time, and as on the course many times life's hazards set up illusions preventing us to be able to prudently assess just how deeply we may be into something.

Accountability with our caddie in life will be critical when in the hazards. Guaranteed much of what we may be trying to pull off due to the cause, our caddie will see as just risky pride.

Making A Comeback

During the PGA Championship, Notah Begay close friend and college teammate of Tiger Woods made the following statement. "The way a great player makes a comeback has more to do with who they are as a person than the talent and experience they have".

Without question, the greatest comeback in golf history had to be Ben Hogan's return to golf after Hogan and his wife Valerie were in an accident where their car was hit head on by a trailer truck. Valerie when questioned at the scene said when Ben realized they were going to be hit, he threw himself in front of her and took the hit.

A great competitor can take the hit (s) life sends their way. They've got that grit that can only be dug out of the dirt. Their attitude is one of humility not entitlement. They focus on God's abundant life and develop "Prosperity" versus a "Poverty" consciousness.

Here's some trivia. Did you know Hogan failed his first two attempts on the tour prior to the accident? He waited 10 years for his first win. His phenomenal career came out of tragedy and an optimism that was incurable. Hogan turned a situation where the doctors thought he would never walk again into the greatest ball striking technique the game has ever seen.

Christ came that we would have life abundant. That abundance however is not found in a brokerage statement, but by digging it out of the dirt of our hearts. Remember this the next time you take one of life's hits. God knew how our lives would go before we were ever in our mother's womb. Yet, He created us anyway.

"Now, Open Your Eyes!"

If you've ever made a long putt that has no business finding the hole, your playing partners may have jokingly said, "Now, Open Your Eyes!".

You may not be aware, but many golfers have actually putted with their eyes closed at times. Vijay Singh has done it and Justin Rose is currently doing it. But why would a golfer putt with their eyes closed? It increases focus and relieves the jitters.

In life, God created us blind - totally dependent on Him. Didn't He? Then "The Great Deceptor" defrauded mankind and we've been covering up with everything life has to offer to relieve life's jitters ever since due to our dependent natures.

We're told that when God takes away one of our senses our other senses are much keener. Going through life blind was what God wanted of us. The greatest conversion of all was arguably that of Saul later known as Paul. How did God become Paul's sole focus? God blinded him and kept him blind for 3 three days making Paul focus on what had happened while he became totally dependent on God as God was preparing Paul to become His greatest ambassador for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Going forward in life should anyone ever question you by asking, *"What are you going through life with your eyes closed?"* You can faithfully respond by saying, *"Yes, and God has me firmly in His perfect grip and I've never seen so clearly."*

Preparing for the Majors

Well, the new golf season is well under way and the year's first major [*The Masters*], first leg of the big four is about to begin. In the majors the pressure is great. On the tour it is said *"It takes a breed to win a major"*.

In life there are the four majors also. The first leg is our relationship with Christ (or as the disciples referred to Him - *"Master"*), and our life work for Him. Let me ask you; is your relationship with Christ of the breed it takes to win a major? Or, is He a 911 God of convenience that you call on when you're fearful or in need?

Whether in life or golf, it takes a real grit to win a major. In the movie [Amazing Grace] there is a scene where William Wilberforce's butler finds him sitting in the wet grass with a pondering look on his face. When asked, Wilberforce tells his butler *"Its God"*. His butler responds, *"Found God Sir?"*. Wilberforce replies, *"No. I think he found me - it's very inconvenient"*.

Let me ask you. Is your relationship with God inconvenient? Is *"The Master" first* above everything else in your life, or is He a fill in...when there's time?

Friday of the Masters is the cut. Stop and think how inconvenient it was for Our Brother as He hung on the cross for sins He didn't commit. Then be real honest and ask yourself if you've really sold out to Him or will you be missing the cut? Finally, don't be too quick to answer. Think of the person or persons that have done the unthinkable to you that you just can't forgive – then take a good look at that cross.

Happy Easter!

NOTE: This year we will cover the 4 majors in golf and the 4 majors in life according to their priority to God...

- **The "US" Open During U.S. Open Week**

- U.S. Open courses are the most unforgiving golf courses in the world. If a golfer hasn't faced their limitations and weaknesses they will become part of the tournament's carnage. In life, unless we are certain of *"Whose"* and *"Who"* we are, and repent, accept, forgive and love ourselves, we will never be much use to God or the people in our lives. The Open demands a very definite game plan. Indecision will lead to disaster.

- **The "Family" Open During British Open Week**

- Nowhere do the elements roar like they do during this championship. Patience! Patience! Patience! That's the best wisdom a player can get for both these majors. Get the drift?

- **The "Work" Championship During P.G.A. Week**

- Unlike the first 3 majors there are no amateurs in this major. You gotta be a professional to play this one. This is the "make-or-break" championship in life. Miss the cut here in life and lives can be destroyed. This championship is known for its deceptiveness.

Preparing For The Majors - The US Open

The season's second major the United States Open is upon us. In the Masters the key word is *"Discipline"*, in the US Open the key word without debate is *"Patience"*. The Greek origin of the word patience is *"pathos"*, which means *"suffering"*. Suffering is translated into anxiety, heartache, discomfort and fear.

How interesting, the Book of Romans 5:3-5 New International Version 1984 (NIV1984) tells us, *"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."*

Life and golf are full of ups and downs, both physical and emotional. The winners in both games humbly accept and respect suffering as a teacher. If there were a golf bible, it could read, *"suffering produces grit, grit, character; and character, a winning breed."*

The saying is, *"it takes a 'breed' to win an Open"*, and that breed has trained themselves to forget the past and *"patiently"* press onward toward the goal which has been so clearly defined they can touch it.

The Art of Laying Up

What an interesting topic for today's lifestyles and entitlement attitudes.

During the second round of this year's Masters, Tiger Woods was faced with a difficult second shot to the Par 5 13th Hole. Tiger elects to go for the green which would take a miracle to knock it on with how poorly he's playing. Well, another golfer is seduced by the beautiful layout called "*Azalea*" and their attempt foiled by the notoriously famed Rae's creek. Tiger would go on to use his incredible short game and make par after taking a penalty shot. Had he laid up he would have walked off the hole with a routine birdie. Then the announcer following Tiger's group makes the following statement. "*Young players today have lost the art of laying up.*" I thought how apropos to life today.

Laying Up in life at one time may have referred to dirty words like, "*sacrifice*" or "*not now*" or "*we can't afford it*". Today, missions or good will trips are heavily promoted. What's the real reason, the resume or to develop the art of the lay up in life? "*No, it's to help the people we are serving.*" How is that? In the Zoloft driven society we live in our stressors are successes the people we "*help*" on missions trips will never achieve. I think if we get back to mastering the art of the layup in life, a more grateful and patient perspective will yield a more fruitful, prosperous, content and gracious life.

Whether it's in life or golf, the majors have a way of deceiving us. The real depression our country is in today is not a result of economics but the result of the lost art of the layup, skewed priorities and the addiction to having to have it ALL - NOW.

The Greatest Game Ever Played

During this year's US Open, I watched the movie [The Greatest Game Ever Played] about two commoners, professional and one of golf's greats Harry Vardon and a young 20 year old amateur who would defeat Vardon in a playoff for the 1913 US Open Francis Quimet.

While golf has become a game of integrity and a metaphor for life, it didn't start out that way. It was originally known as a *"gentlemen's game"*, meaning only high society and those from certain religious and ethnic backgrounds could be members of the early country clubs both here in America and abroad. The commoners were only able to work at the clubs.

Ironically, it was the so-called *"commoners"* like Vardon and Ouimet that would begin transforming a segregated game into a game where all God's children could play. It was Lee Trevino after winning the 1968 US Open who said he would not play in the following year's Masters unless African American Professional Lee Elder was allowed to play. See, even though Elder had qualified to play in the Masters based on his PGA Tour stats, Blacks were not allowed to play at Augusta. Trevino may have been a commoner, but Elder under heavy guard played the 1969 Masters and golf's racial barrier was broken.

The life lesson here is for suburban churches and ministries. Unfortunately, too many of these churches are looked at as country clubs. They are the most segregated places in America each Sunday morning.

Lady Liberty tells us, *"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door"*.

Too many suburban churches and ministries choose to cater to the world's successful - But St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:27 & 28, *"God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are."* Based on the condition of Christianity today, it looks like it's time to put some of the *"commoners"* into the lineup.

How interesting, Christ chose the commoner to change the world, and when closely examined we learn He used the same strategy and chose the commoner to changed *"The Greatest Game Ever Played."*

The Legends of G.O.L.F.
Fr. J. Barry Furey

I remember the day well. I'm attending Sunday Mass in the church where I grew up. There's buzz that a new priest had arrived. Now, picture this. The music starts and down the center isle walks Father J. Barry Furey. His hair is long, he has a beard, he's wearing a flower design vestment, and to top it off, he has a guitar slung over his back. Oh, a point I neglected to mention, this is the city's Italian parish. As Fr. Furey walked down the isle the Old Italian ladies were practically leaping over those next to them as they were repeatedly making the sign of the cross en route to the stained glass windows where they switched to kissing the pictures of the saints as they prayed for this new renegade priest.

As communion time approached, Fr. Furey took his guitar (the Old Italian ladies are now ready to jump out the windows), and he sang the song *"One Bread One Body – One Lord of All"* (unfortunately a song I have yet to hear on the Protestant side of the isle), with a voice that was a gift from his Lord. Then to put the icing on the cake, a few weeks later who is on the front page of the local newspaper? You got it. Fr. Furey as he participated in a citywide ecumenical service with various Christian clergy and a rabbi to boot.

Father Furey would become a close family friend of ours and we got to know him very well. We learned he was an adopted child which weighed very heavy on his heart. He shared with me how he had located his birth mother and was on her porch just about to ring the doorbell and he turned around. He was a hard person to read but I seemed to understand him. I would later learn we were both *"INFJ"* Myers Briggs Types which from what I was told by a highly recognized executive coach, *"You're one of the rare buggers"*.

After a couple of years in the parish, he gave me the honor of assisting him as he went through his doctorate in pastoral ministries studies. While challenging the course which lasted for three years was extremely interesting. He would survive in the parish for 10 years even with the Old Italian ladies correcting his pronunciations as he dared to attempt the 7am Sunday Italian mass attempting to learn Italian as he went along. What a show!

He went on over the next 25 years to pastor several churches in the diocese and to the amazement of many he did so very successfully. His ability to mix and fit in with everyone made him especially successful along with his becoming known as the *"Singing Priest"*.

A couple of weeks ago, Barry went home to be with the Lord very unexpectedly at the young age of 67. He will be missed, but the beauty part of it is those who knew him and walk with The Lord will see him again.

Rest In Peace Barry! I pray you met your mom.

The New Normal

While watching a news segment on the Wounded Warriors, an amputee being interviewed when asked about his recovery said, *"First, you must embrace and accept a new normal"*.

In life a *"new normal"* can be hard to get your hands around, but in golf the decisions are made for us and it's up to us to *"embrace"*, and *"accept"* our new normal and either find the grit to either hang in or hang up. What do I mean? Let's take a look.

- In golf, the older you get the more distance you lose.
- In golf, the older you get the more you lose the taste for the pressure of competition.
- In golf, the older you get you may lose less balls because you don't hit it as far, rather we lose them because we forget where we hit them.
- In golf, the older you get and the more wisdom you gain, the more nerve you lose.

For many of us (and I speak for myself), rather than trying to recover what we once had or did, we might give real consideration to where we are and embrace it as *"The New Normal"*. Many people today are being confronted with financial difficulties the likes of which they never thought possible. Maybe, just maybe, it might be time to learn *"The Art of Laying Up"* (See Tip), and start hitting some safe shots, playing towards your strength, giving up some power, swinging it easy, being patient, being disciplined, just try to get in the money – forget winning and put the EGO aside. The results many times will be amazing and just may lead to a turnaround. Think that's not a winning strategy? Just ask P.G.A. Tour sensation Steve Stricker. Prior to the 2006 US Open at Winged Foot he was ready to pack it in. Today he is ranked #6 in the world. A laid back strategy certainly produced a new normal for Stricker.

A disabled man once told me, *"a disability is not the loss of a limb or our senses - but the loss of hope"*. The American Psychiatric Association tells us today adult hopelessness is at epidemic proportions.

"For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Remember, we were created by God - for God. Rather than putting our hope behind political parties that we can't trust, we might just want to consider putting that hope behind the *"Creator"* that made us. He will NEVER leave nor forsake us.

The Stance and How It Affects the Body

Wow! I just realized as I begin this tip that if its God's will, next year will mark 40 years since entering the golf business at the age of 20 that I have been teaching this great game. Over these years if I have not seen it all - I've come close.

There is one part of the foundation of the golf swing that it is safe to say 90% of golfers get wrong - *"The Stance"*. The interesting part of it is due to the illusion in aiming. Most golfers stance is "closed" to the target and that affects the proper response from the body to assist in producing a well executed golf shot. However, there is one stance many of us who consider ourselves *"Christians"* should be careful with, and that is our closed stance regarding the upcoming presidential election and its subtle response within the Body of Christ. Let's explore.

The talk is that the country today is divided. However, there is a oversight at the church's level pertaining to the intellectual philosophies centering around the candidates salvation and theology that is coming from the rest of us saintly sinners. Following is what we're missing.

The Christian church in America today is hurting. If we as Christians continue with our closed stances regarding theology and salvation, we become even bigger targets for Satan's clever illusion which is to cause further division in what is already a segregated church.

God certainly does not need those He created defending him. As followers of Christ we are supposed to be *"in the world but not of the world"*. We have been commissioned by Christ to *"make disciples"* using what God has put in our hands, not be involved in divisive bloviating. After all, doesn't the bible ask us, *"Who has ever known the mind of the Lord or who has ever been His counselor?"* Romans 11:34. Based on the current condition of things, we're not doing such a hot job at making disciples. Why? Due to our closed stance we are deceptively buying into the illusion.

"For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son to die for our sins." Have you died to self so that you are living without pretense? Can you take on the pain of others because you love them through your own pain? That's what we're called to do.

When all is said and done it will not be a Democrat or Republican victory, - **God wins**. In John 16:33 Jesus tells us, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome this world"*.

The Time To Practice Is When Its Going Well

Have you noticed how in the majority of cases when a pro golfer wins a major event they will many times disappear from the leader board for a while? Why is that?

As in success in life, there is a whole new demand put on their time. They are now living in a whole new arena. Due to the demand on their time and the "fact" that there is only so much we can do in a day, the basics which got them where they now are - suffer.

With all the new found fame and financial gain, no powerful contacts or net worth can satisfy their hunger for another win. All of a sudden the contacts and money become immaterial. It's how we mature in life. Sad fact is, many never find their groove again.

In both life and golf, we tend to get sloppy when things are going well. We tend to become complacent rather than keeping the basics that helped us achieve the success sharply tuned. In some cases, we push the basics aside and become so technical and analytical that we forget who we are which is a major killer when trying to make a comeback. (See "Making A Comeback")

In the Book of Deuteronomy, we read the words "*Be Careful*" over and over again. It cautions about staying on guard after that big win by thinking "it was my power and the strength of my hands that has produced my success".

Real champions know there is that special "*Something*" that separated the "*good*" from the real "*greats*", and that special "Something" can only be kept by digging the basics out of the dirt.

Question, Have you really felt God's grace and the overflow of humility that comes from it? You will know if you have because the overflow of His grace will make it impossible for you to ever say "I'm Too Busy".

"THE GOLDEN BEAR"
(Part One - Some Background)

He first became known as "*Fat Jack*" when he dared to challenge and eventually dethrone golf's golden boy Arnold Palmer. Eyewitnesses say the fans openly rooted against Jack and actually stamped on the ground when he would roll a putt. When asked if what he was experiencing was bothering him, Jack's response was he was there to play golf and really didn't hear anything. And to his credit Arnold was very vocal to let the fans know that he did not applaud their behavior.

I consider myself to be a Nicklaus guru. I followed Jack so closely that I can tell you some of his facial expressions after hitting some of his most memorable shots or facts going back to his junior golf career. And when I read his biography as a young caddie and learned his middle name was "William", I was half out of my mind. For the record, my 6 year old grandson's name is "Jack William." But keeping with full disclosure, the names came from his 2 grandfathers - not Jack.

Then the day came. I was sitting on a bench with Lee Trevino in front of his locker at Westchester Country Club when Jack walked into the locker room. Of course Lee razed him a bit then asked; "Wanna meet Jack?" I literally froze and what hit me were his eyes were like lasers. It was no wonder the attempted heckling and ground shaking from Arnie's Army went unnoticed.

Jack tells the story that his dad Charley went to watch Bobby Jones play in the 1926 US Open at Scioto Country Club in Columbus, Ohio where Jones went on to win and Jack would eventually learn to play the game. While Jack's dad knew Jones' swing was one to be patterned, so was his life as a husband and father.

THE GOLDEN BEAR
PART 2: Golf; Is It Really Mostly About Life?

If memory serves me correctly, it was the later 1960's when the PGA Tour kicked off the season with the Bing Crosby Pro Am and Clambake at Pebble Beach. At the time, this would be the first televised tournament since the previous fall. The tour did not have nearly the extensive schedule it does today. When Jack appeared on the screen, he had taken off a considerable amount of weight during the off season and his hair was longer. The new image made him likable - "Fat Jack" was no more and "The Golden Bear" was born and his dominance of the game was about to slip into overdrive. While there's a saying in golf that "no one owns the game – Jack certainly had a lease on it."

Jack's greatness with the game would speak for itself, however what was becoming the topic was Jack's commitment to his wife Barbara and their five children. As his children were getting older, Jack would cut his tour appearances back quite a bit focusing largely on the majors. His last major was without a doubt his best in my opinion. At the 1986 Masters, Jack 46 years old has his son Jackie on the bag and a young sportscaster by the name of Jim Nantz was covering the 16th green and would say the words that echoed over Augusta after Jack made a birdie 2 which would be just what he needed to seal a 1 stroke victory, "The Bear has come out of hibernation" said Nantz. Jack went on to win his 18th and final major and those golden words would help catapult Nantz onto stardom.

After watching the extraordinary collapse of Tiger Woods, if it had not been for a priority life, think Jack would have assembled the record he did? It's quite doubtful. It's no secret Jack had his business problems over the golden years so he wasn't exempt from pressure as he played the game of life. Support from and being around those you love will never be valued until we have them no longer.

I've been told the priority for a successful life is as follows:

1. God
2. Spouse
3. Children
4. Family
5. Career

THE GOLDEN BEAR

PART 3: Jack on Golf and Life Management

You may remember the 1976 commercial for American Express where Jack is standing behind his desk and he says, “I only spend part of my life on the golf course. Another part of my life is spent in business. After all, man does not live by golf alone.”

Then there was the interview just a few years ago with Jack and Trevino hosted by Jim Nantz. I believe it was towards the end of the interview when Trevino who never knew his father said of Jack, and I paraphrase, “He taught me how to be a father” as he referred to Jack’s wife Barbara as the “family rock.” Nicklaus was always the consummate family man, trying to never play more than two weeks in a row when his children were growing up. He and his wife Barbara have close relationships with their five children: Jackie, Steve, Nan, Gary, and Michael. They are also the grandparents to over 20 grandchildren.

While Jack focused on the fundamentals of life, if you’re a Nicklaus guru as I am you will know Jack (like Hogan) mastered the basics of golf. This enabled Jack to adapt to whatever type of course he was playing. Most tour players will use the expression, “the course fits my game.” Jack fit his game to the course.

Following are some of Jack’s course management techniques to use on the course and in life.

- **Prepare** intelligently
- **Plan** strategically
- **Picture** the shot or task perfectly
- **Play** the highest percentage shot or task
- **Persist** from your purpose
- **Preserve** efforts that might be wasted too early
- **Patiently** attack when the percentages are high
- **Persevere** to success as the competition folds around you.

In closing, here’s some trivia.

- Player agent Mark McCormack who launched his success with Arnold Palmer and would form International Management Group, IMG gave Nicklaus his famous nickname in a magazine interview when he described him as a “Golden Bear.” McCormack would go on to manage and form “The Big Three,” Palmer, Player and Nicklaus.
- Jack’s son Gary was named after Gary Player.

**AUGUSTA LIKE LIFE CANNOT BE ATTACKED - IT DEMANDS
YOU PLAY IT AS IT WAS DESIGNED**

If you're a golf fanatic like me, you count the days to the Masters, The Beauty, The Nerves, The Drama, *The Carnage*. Newcomers learn quickly that Augusta Like Life Cannot Be Attacked, it demands you play it as it was designed. You must play Augusta on its terms and life on its terms.

Recently I heard the following, *"Do I prefer to grow up and face life directly, or do I choose to live and die in fear?"* Another way of putting it is, *"Am I going to 'participate' in life, or am I going to 'anticipate' life."* How are you feeling this morning? It's Monday and psychologists tell us there's a natural anxiety attached to it. In professional golf Saturday is "moving day" in life Monday for most is "anticipation day." Let's check out the causes in both games.

You gotta have faith in something **outside** yourself. As a life-coach I've observed the majority of pressure "We" carry we put on ourselves and I'm convinced we do it for (2) very critical reasons:

1. We've lost respect for authority. I'm convinced that lack of authority creates a void impossible to fill on our own.
2. Since we have no respect for authority, "Who we are" just doesn't ever seem to measure up. As a result, we're living like we're chasing after the wind. Have you ever seen the wind? You may have seen the "affects" of the wind but you've never seen the wind. Therefore we're aiming at nothing.

Feeling a bit of pressure today? It may be well-founded and providing it's not legal in nature – it can still be overcome.

1. Set your game plan / schedule - to match your game / your human capacity.
2. Pick your mistake.
3. Focus on execution – **not results**.

Life's winners embrace pressure because they embrace authority. It's the first day of the work week; position yourself just like the pro's do in the first round of a major. Play the day on its terms and tonight when you look at the day in reverse you will see that this morning's anxiety was just **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal.

Never forget, a great golf course architect sets up a golf hole with illusions to get in your head and instill fear or worse, make you try to dominate it. A seasoned professional knows this and when they look at the hole from the green back to the tee they see the real deal.

GRIPPING TOO TIGHT

Gripping a golf club too tight will cause a golfer to push or in golf terms, "block" the shot they are hitting. This happens at times to professionals when they are under extreme pressure. In recent years the most famous "blocked" tee shot was hit by Phil Mickelson off the 72nd tee at the 2006 US Open at Winged Foot costing him the coveted major.

In life when we're under pressure we tend to grip our circumstances too tight blocking out God's Spirit and Leading which causes us to miss the answer to our stress. So what do we do in both games to avoid this disastrous flaw?

It's all about our life vision in both games. If our vision is realistic - our attitude will be realistic.

- We need to step back with our caddie or confidant and refer to our pressure checklist:
- Establish a Perspective that coincides to our life vision.
- Get In The Present but Be Careful! Denial can feel like The Present. In The Present you're functioning - In Denial we will find ourselves protected or buffered by long shots, grandiose thoughts or unrealistic solutions.
- Inner Coaching Kicks In and Mental Toughness Takes Over
- Believe and Keep It Simple. You will feel your grip lightening. An incurable optimism is an absolute must. **Faith without Logic is a winning formula.**
- We must believe with all of our being that neither game owes us anything.
 - **Accepting the possibility of defeat - takes defeat off the table.**
 - **Accelerating a Faith without Logic – keeps our grip on life firm not tight allowing us to release our focus to our Target.**

Are we playing life with the swing that's inside each one of us? If we are, a winning rhythm will show up to help us stare the pressure down.

"I GOT AWAY WITH THAT ONE!"

There are times during a round of golf when we poorly hit a shot and we come out smelling like a rose. When that happens the golfer will many times say, *"I got away with that one."* It should then put humility in the golfer along with true gratitude for a success they had absolutely nothing to do with.

Over the years as we play the game of life there are many great results and blessings that we know we got away with that we had absolutely nothing to do with also. Yet, in life rather than experiencing a sense of humility and gratitude, we tend to act as if we were entitled to the great result. Why the difference?

On the golf course the other players in our group will humble us when we get away with a poor shot because they will remind us about our good fortune for the remainder of the round, then rub it in around the guys in the grille room which as we know will hold us accountable indefinitely.

In life today we need to make the time for accountability. Being held accountable keeps us humble and will make gratitude a reflex. It will give us someone to let us know how lucky *"or blessed"* we are and have been. Another blessing with accountability is we will also have support when a great effort turns against us.

“IT!” – Do You Have “IT”?

While watching The Golf Channel during the past US Open, the commentators were discussing some of the great champions to have won the majors and while mentioning their names it seemed the common expression used for each was, *"he really had it."* Upon realizing what was being said, one of the commentators asked, *"What is 'IT'?"* Let's take a look.

- What was the "IT" that not only gave Ben Hogan the courage, but the ability to hit what is now his famous 1 iron on the 72nd hole of the 1950 US Open at Merion?
- What was the "IT" that gave Arnold Palmer the guts to attempt that exciting 3 wood shot out of a lie that defied physics on the 72nd hole of the 1968 PGA at Pecan Valley Golf Club in San Antonio that took off like a 747 and settled within 10 feet of the hole?
- What was the "IT" that gave Jack the confident ability to hit what's been called a miracle 1 iron boring through the winds on the 17th hole of the final round of the 1972 US Open at Pebble Beach that hit the pin and sat down inches from the hole?
- What was the "IT" that sent Watson's trickling chip on the 71st hole of the 1982 US Open at Pebble Beach right into the bucket slamming the door on another major for Jack as he waited on 18?
- What was the "IT" that Tiger had with that dramatic chip in at the 2005 Masters that brought everyone to their knees?
- Finally, what was the "IT" Trevino was drinking when he won 3 national championships (US, Canadian and British Opens) in 1971 in a span of just 20 days?

It's called G.R.I.T. which at Game of Life we refer to as **G**reatness **R**esponds **I**ntensely to **T**esting. The last two words "Intensely" and "Testing" is the "IT". These great champions not only pulled off great shots, but they did them in exciting and dramatic ways. G.R.I.T. can't be taught - only learned. Champions learn to spit the taste of defeat out of their mouths. They also swallow **and own** defeats and they end up getting shaped by them.

In life each and every one of us will have our defeats - some of us more so than others. There are those that get caught up in the "shouldas" and "couldas" while the champions in both games have developed the mental toughness to smile at them.

How fitting that the Apostle Peter who himself got caught up in the "shouldas" and "couldas" at times would have the answer to finding "IT". In 1 Peter 1:7 he wrote, *"These (defeats) will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold--though your (grit) is far more precious than mere gold. So when your (grit) remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world."*

PRESSURE - A PRIVILEGE?

What are you doing with your life? Are you here to win? Well if you are you had better learn to embrace pressure as a privilege. Why, because God told us that in this world we would face pressure, but to fear not, He had overcome this world.

Let's examine pressure. You've got a 2 shot lead with 2 holes to play and your playing opponent has just birdied the last 3 holes. Is that opponent applying pressure on you? That's the strategy. Hey, if you were 2 back with 2 to play, wouldn't you be doing the same thing?

What about in life, you're pressing to make a deadline on a major project, and at the eleventh hour your boss throws in a major change. Is that applying pressure?

In the 2 preceding examples the persons applying the so called pressure are trying to excel and they have every right to apply pressure in order to do so.

Let me ask you this; if you knew the outcome of the situation while the pressure was being applied, would you still feel the pressure? That would be senseless. The wise response would be to accept the outcome.

So pressure is really an imposter and its uncertainty that is the real hustler that robs us of life in pressure situations. When the pressure mounts it's a privilege because you're going to come through the situation a better person than when you went into it providing you accept the outcome.

No One Remembers A Loser Unless They Lose With Gusto. Loosing is as much a part of life as winning so accept it. If you lose with gusto the rhythm of life will make living a whole lot more enjoyable.

S.L.U.M.P.

During this past week's U.S. Men's Open, there was a discussion between a few of the commentators wondering what it is that makes some of the recent major champions fall into a slump after winning a major. A couple of the comments were...

"They begin searching for what it will take to win more majors."

Unless I'm just too simple minded, if they have won a major, don't they already have what it takes?

"The new found pressure these guys have on them makes it hard for them to concentrate on their games."

My heart is really at the breaking point now as a result of the millions of dollars that come from a major tournament victory. Isn't that what they compete for – The Pressure?

I'm a guy who has failed many times at both life and golf, and digging those failures out of the dirt is what has given me the privilege to share my experience, strength and hope with numerous others. In my opinion after hundreds of observations I am convinced that a "Slump" in both games is caused because "Sophistication Leads to Unrealistic Measures of Performance."

In 1984, I sold my first one million dollar life insurance policy which was a good sale back then and I did it by simply applying the basics and I won the deal from my strength – "Service." Then I arrived! It was time to begin writing sophisticated financial and estate plans and I then couldn't make a sale to save my life. However, I can tell you that millions of dollars can cause tremendous pressure. Since that first sale I have delivered millions of dollars to surviving spouses who thought money was the answer before one of them died. What was amazing was the exact thing they thought was the solution caused more stress and pressure then when their lives were simple. It wasn't the money however, but their attitudes toward and real happiness which is a course in of itself.

The best coaching for a slump which can be applied in either game came from the wisdom of Bagger Vance (Played by Will Smith), while caddying for a fictitious down and out former golf phenom by the name of Rannulph Junah.

Bagger: *"Yeah the rhythm of the game just like the rhythm of life...Inside each and every one of us is one true authentic swing... Somethin' we was born with... Somethin' that's ours and ours alone... Somethin' that can't be taught to ya or learned... Somethin' that got to be remembered... Over time the world can, rob us of that swing... It get buried inside us under all our wouldas and couldas and shouldas... Some folk even forget what their swing was like...There's a perfect swing trying to choose each one of us....The swing that was given to you when you came into this world..."*

Then it seems what ends up happening to today's bonus babies is they end up getting "discouraged" because of the demands on them. While caddying for Junuh who was plagued

with acute discouragement (Team Satan's most effective weapon), Bagger had the following wisdom for Junuh.

"So, there's no difference...between winning and losing, and anything in between hah Mr. Junuh?...What's lost is lost...A man lives, a man dies...In the end it all turns out the same...So a soul is born with everything the Lord give it...things don't go it's way, so it gives up, and the Lord takes...everything back...and then the soul dies alone...That pretty much what you said?"

Junuh Responds: *"That's right."*

Bagger: *"That's a sad story, Mr. Junuh -. Yes, it is. – In fact, **That's the dumbest thing I heard any fool say...Ever!**"*

Me Too! - FIND YOUR GAME!!!!

**TRUE G.R.I.T.
A LOOK AT GARY PLAYER.
POUND FOR POUND - NO ONE HAD MORE!**

He stood 5'6" weighing all of 150 pounds – and loaded with TNT. Gary Player from Johannesburg, South Africa burst on the world golf scene in 1957. Pound for pound and inch by inch, no one in the history of professional sport in my opinion had more grit than he did.

In 1961 he would burst onto the US scene beating Arnold Palmer by winning the Masters after having the 1959 British Open already on his major win list. Between the PGA and the Senior PGA Tours he would win 18 majors and is only one of 5 golfers to have won all four of golf's modern Majors at any time during their careers, an achievement which is often referred to as a Career Grand Slam. The other four are: Gene Sarazen, Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, and Tiger Woods.

Not many know that Gary Player has won 165 tournaments on six continents over six decades and was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 1974. When the topic of the greatest golfer in the world comes up, Gary Player has logged more than 15 million miles playing golf worldwide. There may never be another true world class golfer like him.

Due to his size, Player has become known as "Mr. Fitness." He knew that for him to compete he would need to be in top physical condition. He not only would be able to compete but would be one of those to beat when he was in a tournament. Most importantly, Gary Player is probably the finest gentleman to ever play the game in the professional ranks. So admired I'll give you some trivia. Jack Nicklaus named his son Gary after Player. Gary and his wife Vivienne have been married for 57 years and have 6 children.

Sure he had GRIT, but do you think he could have accomplished what he did travelling the distances he did if his life was in an unmanageable condition? Without his life being in order, he would have NEVER been able to respond “**I**ntensely to **T**esting” – “**IT!**”

See Tip “IT!”

So, what if your life has strayed a bit off line? Are you done? Is it time to throw in the towel? It's been said, *“No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.”* In John 10:10 we read, *“The Thief (Discouragement, Despair, Anxiety, Fear...) comes only to steal and kill and destroy (Your Life); I (Jesus) have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

In golf when you hit it out of bounds you reload, take your penalty and hit another. In my day I've seen many players walk off the course rather than taking the penalty and pressing on. We have that option in life too. It's called Free Will. I don't know whether it's true or not, but I heard when Gary Player would hit a poor shot, rather than slamming the club into the bag he would pause and take a practice swing picturing the perfect shot he wanted to hit, hand the club to his caddie and walk calmly to the next shot. As I said, I don't know if it's true but it serves as a helpful exercise for both games.

Let's close with some wisdom from Bagger. *"Ain't a soul on this entire earth ain't got a burden to carry he don't understand, you ain't alone in that..... Time to go on... lay it down... Time for you to come on out the shadows... Time for you to choose..."*

Jesus told us to seek His kingdom *(to use our experience to benefit others and bring glory to Him)* and anything we need will be given to us.

Remember, **Greatness Responds Intensely to Testing, - G.R.I.T.**

PICK UP YOUR MAT – AND WALK!

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

During my caddying days I caddied for a guy by the name of Louie. Louie was a hustler with homemade golf game. He would putt with the toe of the blade in the air and cut every putt, yet no one made more clutch putts than Louie. Rather than hitting a punch shot to keep the ball low, Louie would hit a skull shot. That takes talent! Louie's method for getting around a golf course would make his opponents crazy - which was a big part of his strategy. Had Louie shaped a textbook swing he wouldn't have been able to break a hundred. Louie didn't know what he didn't know, but you couldn't tell him that.

Today's young golfers all swing by the textbook except for a few exceptions. It's much like the way many of us in suburbia live today. See the problem with sameness is that when life mounts it's challenges, sameness doesn't stand up to it. We've become so conscious with technique in both games that we've come to ignore the God-giving talent we were given by being made in His image. Maybe I'm beginning to get old and crotchety but I think both games today would be more fun and fulfilling if we had more Louie's to make it interesting.

See, when God made us He did so by shaping us knowing we would encounter and respond to things we don't know - but don't know we don't know. In fact He tells us in His word that we will never encounter anything He hasn't been through first but not to worry because He will provide us with a way out. Problem is if we're not playing with the swing He gave us, we won't instinctively respond.

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End Notes

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