

From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, June 17, 2014

I know that the world is thinking about soccer, but some of you will know that the U.S. Open Golf Championship was played in Pinehurst, North Carolina last weekend. And if you know that, you probably also know that Germany's Martin Kaymer won the championship with an amazing eight-shot victory over his nearest challenger, becoming only the seventh man to win the U.S. Open from start to finish,¹ and the first man to win the Players Championship and the U.S. Open in the same season.



Now to call myself a golfer is rather a stretch, but I have been known to chase a ball or two from time to time, and I was interested recently to discover that Scott Peck, a Christian psychiatrist whose writings I enjoy, has written a book called *Golf and the Spirit: Lessons for the Journey*. And so, with Kaymer's achievement still echoing through cyberspace, I've decided to pass along a few of Dr. Peck's thoughts to you. I think you'll get his points, whether you "chase golf balls" or not.

While not all that follows is a direct quote from Dr. Peck, and while I've played enough golf to have learned some of these things on my own, these thoughts have been gleaned by and large from *Golf and the Spirit* . . .

To begin, Dr. Peck noted that "One is highly unlikely to envision the frustrating game of golf as a potential spiritual discipline unless he has first been captured by the vision of the whole of life as a journey of spiritual growth, as a pilgrimage. Once he has been so captured, however, he can begin to see golf as a particularly lovely stretch on the journey where great movement is possible. I do not mean outward movement from tee to green to tee; I mean inner movement of the soul."

This movement is not automatic, however. Many learn how to play better golf but learn nothing about themselves in the process and nothing about life. Hard though it may be for golfers to grasp, score is not the real point of the game. There are many points to golf, of which soul learning and growth are the greatest, and score the least. The real point is whether or not we learn to see ourselves as pilgrims on a spiritual journey toward God.

Golf is not about one thing but many. It's as much about comradeship as competition, as much about failure as success; as much about anticipation as remembering, as much about learning as enjoyment, and as much about prayer as performance. For most of us, golf has a lot more to do with our psychology and spirituality than it does with our ability.

If you play golf, I don't know how you got started, but there are many beginners who have played dreadfully all day long only to make one good shot on the last hole and in that one shot become hooked forever. That was pretty much what happened to me. As Dr. Peck put it, "In the flight of a well-hit golf ball we have a tiny taste of glory" . . . and we deeply desire to experience that again.

For those who are ready, golf is a powerful teacher of emotional maturity and spiritual wisdom. Like many games, but perhaps more than most, golf is almost guaranteed to bring to the surface flaws in a person's character that might not be visible otherwise. That's actually really good news, because it's only when our character flaws are out in the open that we're able to work on them.

¹ The others were Walter Hagen (1914), Jim Barnes (1921), Ben Hogan (1953), Tony Jacklin (1970), Tiger Woods (2000 and 2002), and Rory McIlroy (2011).

As you probably know, much of golf has to do with obstacles. The list of possibilities is almost endless: sand traps, narrows, out-of-bounds marshes, trees, forests, gulches and canyons, uneven lies, deep rough, cultivated rough, ocean water, pond and stream water, pitched or rolling or tiered greens, rain and wind, and on and on we could go.

Golf courses are designed to be playable, but not necessarily easy to play, and life itself is also an uneven affair with “roughs” and “hazards” of every sort imaginable. If we’re paying attention, the external obstacles we encounter on a golf course have the considerable benefit of putting us in touch with internal obstacles we may have tried to ignore: excessive striving, pride, shame, laziness, anger at others, anger at ourselves, depression, perfectionism, narcissism, obsession with looking good, fearfulness, overconfidence, underconfidence, inattentiveness, failure to remember what we’ve learned, failure to anticipate what we might encounter next . . . and on and on we could go again.



Anger, for example, is stereotypically envisioned on the golf course as a golf club wrapped around a tree. A round of golf does indeed have the potential to surface anger in many forms; but it is not possible to play golf well when one is angry, so a typical morning or afternoon on the links will present many opportunities for learning how to divest oneself of anger and frustration.

Most of us bounce back and forth in normal life between mild elation (when everything seems to be going our way) and mild depression (when everything seems to be conspiring against us).

A frequent effect of a round of golf is to speed up that oscillation, so that we have more material to work with!

Not only is it impossible to play golf well when one is angry, but it is also very difficult to play well if one is preoccupied either with how badly one played the previous hole or with anticipating how difficult the rest of the course appears to be. There is virtue, of course, in learning from the mistakes of the past, and there is virtue in doing what one can to prepare for challenges in the future; but the key to playing well is to “play one hole at a time.”

Good golfers actually play “one *shot* at a time”; and because “hope springs eternal,” golfers can be encouraged by the possibility that no matter how badly we may have played the front nine, there is always the chance that we might redeem ourselves on the back nine. By God’s grace, our lives can be like that, too. You and I don’t have to be determined by our past, either by what we ourselves have done or by what others may have done to us. No matter what is behind us, God invites us into a future that is more wonderful than we have yet imagined.

Finally, the point of practice is to make a habit of the unnatural, and a round of golf presents many chances to experience obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow. As we become better at practicing that transformation, we fill not just the golf course but life itself with blessings.

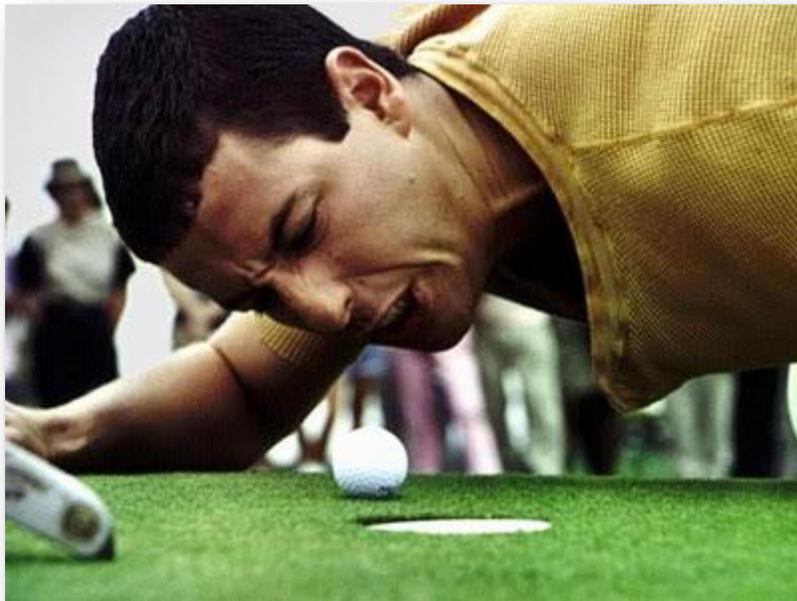
For those with eyes to see, it is actually possible to approach a golf course with anticipation, curiosity, and gratitude. Wondering internally what the next four hours may have to teach us, we arrive at the course regarding the ability and the opportunity to play as gifts from God that are worth celebrating.

Keep your eyes open!

Dave

Postscript: I continue to be impressed by the enormous variety and quality of the videos available to us through RightNow media.

- If you're a CBFer and haven't logged on yet, you're missing literally thousands of treats.
- If you've lost your login invitation, just email me and I'll send you another one.



The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week twenty-four:

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;
as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34).*

My high school chemistry teacher used to always talk about the “acid test.” The acid test is a surefire way to identify a substance. The Bible reveals that the acid test of the Christian life is love. Love is not simply a virtue of the Christian life; it *is* the Christian life. It is the oxygen of the kingdom. There is no life without it. Everything—the spiritual gifts, prophecy, knowledge, wisdom—will come to an end, but love knows no end. It goes right on through the portal of death and into eternity. Paul said that if we “have not love, it profits [us] nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

In the previous chapter we memorized the Great Commandment. Now, on the very evening before His crucifixion, our Lord gave us a “new commandment” that supersedes the others not only in attitude, but also in action.

A NEW RULE:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you”

A casual reading of this text might tempt the reader to pass over two very important words. For one, this is a *commandment*. It is not a suggestion or a mere option. And it is a *new commandment*. Although the language of the New Testament reveals that this commandment is not new in time (God’s love has been around forever), this commandment is new in its expression.

Until now, on the very eve of the crucifixion, the best we could do was to live on the level of “the old commandment.” This old commandment is found in Leviticus 19:18 and referenced in the Great Commandment. That is, we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This self-love is a love with limits.

But real love is expressed by a new rule. For thirty-three years Jesus gave us a picture of how real love was to be evidenced. Up until then, the best we could do was to live on the level of the old commandment of self-love. In essence, Jesus said, “No longer are you to love one another as you love yourself, but ‘as I have loved you.’”

A NATURAL REACTION: *“as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”*

We are totally incapable of loving like this on our own. The only way this can become a natural reaction for us is to experientially know the love of Christ in our own hearts. Once we receive His love, we are to release it to others in the same way He loves us.

In order to love others on this level, we must know the kind of love with which Jesus loves us. His love is *unlimited* (Romans 8:39; Ephesians 3:18). His love is *unconditional* (Romans 5:8). And His love is *unselfish*, so much so that it took Him all the way to the cross. And of course, we should note that His love is also *unchangeable* (Hebrews 13:8).

What is the result of this type of love? The very next verse is explicit: “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35). Perhaps John put it best when he said, “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1 John 4:7–8).

Yes, love *is* the Christian life. It is the oxygen of the kingdom. It is the acid test of our own discipleship. God did not write in the sky or send a tract in order to reveal His love toward us. He sent His Son. Love did that. He demonstrated His love to us.