

## ***“The Back 9: Life Lessons Learned Later in Life”***

### ***Hole #12, “Discipline”***



### ***“The Practice Range”***

*“The more I practice the luckier I get.”*

*--Arnold Palmer, Champion Golfer*

Arnold Palmer was one of the greatest and most charismatic golfers in the sport's history. Nicknamed “The King”, Palmer was one of golf's most popular stars and seen as a trailblazer and a risk-taker on the golf course. Arnie was the first superstar athlete in the television age of the 1960's.

His immense popularity peaked at the US Open in 1960. “Arnie's Army” was born. Millions of fans from around the world felt a personal connection with the hard-working affable young man from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, the center of the working class steel belt of America. I was a proud member of “Arnie's Army”. To this day, I cherish his autograph still hanging on the wall in my study.

People loved seeing Arnie hit spectacular shots in high-pressure situations. What the public did not see was the thousands of hours Palmer spent on the practice range hitting golf balls until his hands were blistered and bleeding. Arnold Palmer performed on “game day” because he spent countless hours on the practice range when no one was watching. When asked by a reporter about a lucky break he received in a round, Palmer replied, *“The more I practice, the luckier I get.”* I laugh every time see his quote. So profoundly true.

What is true in golf is true in life. There are really no shortcuts to great performances in sports... or in life. All great performances have one characteristic in common...discipline. Discipline is simply doing the hard work required, when no one is watching, that leads to a great performance. All great performances on “game day” happen because of hundreds of hours of hard work spent on the practice field when no one is watching.

### **Hole #12, “Discipline”**

The practice range of the Christian life is prayer. As followers of Jesus Christ, we desire to emulate the way he lived his life. He encountered difficult circumstances and difficult people on a regular basis. His life embodied love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. I believe he developed these character traits of God on the practice range of prayer with his Heavenly Father when no one was looking.

The gospel of Mark gives us a glimpse into the life of Jesus on the practice range of prayer. Often we find Jesus taking time away for his daily discipline of prayer with his Heavenly Father. On one specific instance, Jesus healed many who had come to him late into the night. The next morning his disciples were searching for him to attend to the needs of the growing crowds. The gospel writer tells us,

*“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”*

*(Mark 1:35)*

For centuries, the Spiritual Disciplines of meditation and prayer have sustained people of faith in their everyday lives. Prayer is simply pausing to listen to the voice of God who loves us. We engage in an intimate conversation with the Lord in ways that nourish our souls. In prayer, God molds our hearts into the likeness of Christ. Prayer changes us...when no one is watching.

Jesus spent time each morning with his Heavenly Father in prayer over his upcoming daily activities. What if we began each morning with the simple prayer, ***“Lord, as I look over the day in front of me, help me to see people as you see them. Let me be your encouraging presence to everyone I meet today.”***

My guess is if we were to spend 15 minutes a day on the discipline of prayer, we would notice a significant change in our daily lives. We would love more, laugh more, feel more and celebrate more all that God wants to do in and through us in this game called life.

Now, it's on to lucky Hole #13, a short par 4. This is one of those risk/reward holes. I think I will risk going for the green from the tee. Arnie would be proud!