

“The Back 9: Life Lessons Learned Late in Life”

Hole #17, “Perseverance”



“Never Give Up”

“Days when you just don’t have it, you don’t pack it in, you give it everything you’ve got. You grind it out.”

Tiger Woods, Champion Golfer

As we arrive at the 17th Hole on the Back 9 of our lives, we realize the round is nearly over. We have celebrated some little victories over the past several holes and have lamented over some bad decisions, bad breaks and some ugly shots. By the 17th Hole, we usually know whether it has been a good day or not. Like life, on some days, golf is easy. Everything feels good. Other days, the game seems impossible. The energy is just not there. As we approach the 17th Tee Box on a bad day, it is difficult to stay motivated to finish strong.

Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, Tiger Woods was the dominant force in golf. He was the top-ranked golfer in the world for 545 weeks from August 1999 to October 2010. During that time, he won 14 major championships and 72 PGA tournaments...all before his 35th birthday.

However, personal problems and injuries characterized the next decade of Woods' career. Through a combination of heartbreaking life decisions and physical injuries, the greatest golfer of our generation hit rock bottom. After admitting to multiple infidelities, Woods lost his marriage, his impeccable image and many of his multi-million dollar endorsements. He then took a self-imposed hiatus from professional golf to seek help in his personal life. He lost his health to four back surgeries that left him unable to get out of bed, much less swing a club. Woods

competed in only one tournament between August 2015 and January 2018, and he dropped off the list of the world's top 1,000 golfers. As he stepped on the 17th Tee Box on the Back 9 of his career, Tiger Woods almost gave up. Almost.

Hole #17, "Perseverance"

Perseverance is making the conscience decision to dig down deep inside and summon the courage to give it everything you have even when the odds are stacked against you. The great Winston Churchill said,

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts"

In Hebrews Chapter 11, the author summarizes the life of those in the Hall of Fame of faith like Noah, Abraham and Moses. God commended them for their faith when facing insurmountable obstacles. They never gave up hope. Hebrews Chapter 12 opens with these words,

*"Therefore, Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. and **let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.**"*

(Hebrews 12:1-2)

The context of Hebrews 12 is an athletic stadium full of Hall of Famers who have gone before us in the faith. They are cheering us on to victory in the race of the Christian life. They are pulling for us not to quit when we feel like we cannot take one more step. Their cheers get louder for those of us running in last place. It is not about winning. It is about finishing. Even though our muscles are burning in pain, we persevere.

Some of us are currently living with circumstances that feel insurmountable. We may have more bad days than good ones. This season of isolation is getting old. Loneliness is common. Issues of health have become more complex with the precautions of COVID-19. We wonder if this season of sheltering in place and social distancing will ever end. We are weary. During the bad days, the Scriptures remind us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the source of our hope. He who persevered the brutality of the cross understands our weariness. He is our anchor, our safety and security who sustains us in all our days. Finishing the race *is* winning, so we persevere.

On April 14, 2019, Tiger Woods completed what Michael Jordan called, "The greatest comeback in sports history" by winning the Masters after an 11-year major championship drought. Tiger persevered in the worst of times in golf...and in life. He is a great golfer again. He is a better father. Tiger is different. He has persevered in golf...and in life.

Well, I gave it my best on the 17th hole and I am on my way to the final hole of the round. I have had a great day even though the number of my bad shots has far outweighed the good ones. I want to finish strong even though I will not win today. Although the scorecard will not reflect it, I am glad I gave it all I had....