

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

Hole #18, “Respect”



“The Handshake”

“But in the end it’s still a game of golf, and if at the end of the day if you can’t shake hands with your opponents and still be friends, then you’ve missed the point.”

Payne Stewart, Champion Golfer

We have arrived at the final hole of the round. The majority of the round (and of life) is behind us, yet we still have challenges in front of us. We all desire to finish well. The 18th hole becomes the ultimate test of, not only our physical abilities, but also of our character. When the last putt drops into the hole - win or lose - we take off our hats, look our competitors in the eyes and offer one another a handshake. Every round of golf begins and ends the same way, with, *“a gripping and shaking of right hands by two individuals, as to symbolize greeting, **respect**, congratulations, agreement or farewell.”*

Payne Stewart was the consummate professional in demonstrating respect to his fellow competitors. On June 20, 1999 (Father’s Day), Payne Stewart made a dramatic putt on the 18th green to win the US Open Championship. His competitor that day was Phil Mickelson. Phil and his wife Amy were expecting their first child at any time. When the winning putt dropped into the hole, Payne walked up to Phil, cupped his hands around his face said, *“You are going to love being a father!”* Phil’s eyes filled with tears. Payne Stewart’s act of kindness and sportsmanship on that Father’s Day taught me the life lesson of ... respect for others.

Only four months later, Payne Stewart was killed in the crash of a Learjet flying from his home in Orlando, Florida to Texas for the year-ending tournament, The Tour Championship. He was 42 years old and in the prime of his career and his life as new Christian, a loving husband and a

proud father of his 2 young children. The world of golf mourned the passing of a great man whose legacy involved placing others above himself, even his competitors.

The following year, 2000, the PGA Tour established *The Payne Stewart Award* to be given each year at the season ending Tour Championship to the player whose "*values align with the character, charity and sportsmanship that Stewart showed*". In life, and in death, Payne won golf's ultimate prize ... respect.

Hole #18, "Respect"

Respect is showing, "*esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person...*" In his letter to the Philippiian church, the Apostle Paul speaks of valuing others above ourselves. With the life of Jesus as the ultimate example of how we should live, Paul writes,

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4)

Paul begins the second chapter of Philippians with a poetic description of how Jesus placed the interests of others above his own. Regularly, we see Jesus offering dignity and respect to all people. He gave them his time. He gave them his touch. He gave them his prayers. He touched a man with leprosy. He shared meals with non-religious people. He invited little children to be with him. He affirmed the value and dignity of women in his day. Jesus valued the interests of others above his own. He challenged his followers to do the same. He still does. The God of all creation came to earth to affirm the value and dignity of every human life. In Jesus Christ, God came to be with us ... to shake our hands.

Showing respect for all people is honoring the inherent worth, value and dignity God has given to every human being. The man with leprosy came to life once Jesus touched him (Mark 1). He began to believe in himself again. His life had value and purpose. A divorced Samaritan woman at a well was overwhelmed when she felt valued and respected by Jesus. She was empowered to become the first evangelist of the New Testament era (John 4). A "despised tax-collector" became the author of the first gospel after he and his tax-collector friends invited Jesus over for dinner (Matthew 9). Respect empowers. When we reach out our hands in respect to others, especially our competitors, *we* are changed. Winning is no longer the most important thing.

After the handshake on the 18th green, we head to the parking lot to put our golf clubs in our cars, take off our golf shoes and make our way... to the 19th hole! The round is not over! The most important hole is still in front of us. We gather on the patio of the clubhouse to share the joys and miseries of one another's rounds (lives). I invite you to join my friends and me at the 19th hole as we celebrate the journey from competitors to friends. I will save a seat for you at the table....