

## MATTERS OF THE HEART, PART 8

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.” (John 14:1, NIV)

**W**HAT IS THE ONE THING YOU ALWAYS DO before you take the club back at the beginning of your golf swing?

Often when you watch golf on television, you’ll hear some good discussion about a player’s pre-shot routine. And here’s the summary of all those observations: It’s not important what’s in your routine, it’s important that you have one. More than that, it’s important that you stick to it.

When pressure comes, even the best athletes in the world can subconsciously tweak their long-practiced patterns. They become unnaturally quick or unnecessarily deliberate. Whatever has been normal suddenly isn’t. And this change can have every kind of adverse effect on an athlete’s performance—far more than the change in circumstances around them might.

Maybe too often, life mirrors sport. Here is another example. Trouble comes. There is no getting around that. But what we do when trouble presents itself can have real bearing on the long-term impact of the trouble, both on us and those around us.

In reading the account of the Old Testament prophet Daniel, we are often familiar with the basic details. He was an honorable man, ranking highly among the king’s advisors. But other jealous leaders seized a chance to entrap Daniel: they went after his worship of God. Yet when the troubling “no-win” scenario was brought to Daniel, he did not panic. We don’t even know if his pulse quickened. What we do know is that Daniel did *just as he had done before*. He went to his knees in prayer, a thrice-daily pattern he had apparently followed for years. The continued action became the evidence his enemies needed to condemn Daniel. In the den of his judgment, Daniel could have found himself in the mouths of lions; instead he found himself in the hands of God. Protected. Saved. Honored anew.

There is no such guarantee for those who are faithful. It was Daniel’s own friends who, when threatened with the fiery furnace, told Nebuchadnezzar, “Even if our God does not protect us, we will not bow down to your idol.” They too adhered to their routine of faith, not knowing the outcome, but trusting the One who did. Whom will you trust in such a moment? How firm is the faith you fall back on?

**Opening questions** What are some habits that comprise your pre-shot routine? • Do you have regular practices for spiritual growth that you believe contribute to the furthering of your faith?

**READING** Daniel 6:10-12; 1 Chronicles 28:9-10; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

### Unflagging devotion (Daniel 6)

What was Daniel’s routine? How do you think this served him in his normal daily life? How do you think it served him when great trouble came his way?

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### ‘Wholehearted devotion’ (1 Chronicles 28)

What did David desire for Solomon? What do you think this looks like? How can it be applied to practical assignments, such as the work you are given on the job (for Solomon: building the temple)?

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### ‘Undivided devotion’ (1 Corinthians 7)

Paul wrote that even something God-ordained like marriage can divide our devotion to the Lord. How do you maintain faithfulness to God that honors him and serves others? If you are married, how can you and your spouse encourage one another in commitment to Christ?

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