

THE OR SERIES 6: STEADY OR SPIRIT-INFUSED?

Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. (Titus 2:2, NIV)

IF YOU PAY EVEN SMALL ATTENTION TO THE VOICES in the golf world, it's the question that will not die: Will Tiger Woods ever make it back?

I won't speculate, but I will say that what lies behind the conversation are considerations of longevity. Will too many injuries, too many emotional and spiritual catastrophes, too many young rising stars, and too many dad-at-home interests make it Tiger's biggest challenge yet to truly compete again on Tour?

When Jesus told the parable of the sower, who went out with the seeds of the word to implant the kingdom of God in people's hearts, we read that some small plants heard the message with favor but didn't last. Look: "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).

Life makes it hard to last. With so many things to do, it becomes increasingly hard to do any one thing well.

It's not just minions whose busyness keeps them from what is best. Hezekiah, one of Judah's righteous kings, fell into the trap of riches and privilege. Even when God healed Hezekiah from a deadly illness, "Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness that was shown him" (2 Chronicles 32:25).

We want to see God in the miraculous, the wonderful, the Spirit-filled. High drama lives in these moments and they can add a charge to our faith. But God is a realist. He knows that these moments—and the faith that might accompany them—are fleeting. In Luke 17, we read of Jesus healing 10 lepers. Only one, however, "came back, praising God in a loud voice." This one threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. "Where are the other nine?" Jesus asked. Now I *will* speculate. In only minutes, the other nine had jumped back into the opportunities and responsibilities their culture gave them. Almost instantly, they were too busy to worship.

For our mixed audience, I sometimes hesitate to start with a passage that addresses men specifically, as today's does. But we see instruction in Paul's words whether we are men or women. Along with character, faith, and love, we need to learn endurance. We want the seed implanted in us to grow to full fruition.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2017 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: https://youtu.be/UnNn9yI_YH0

Opening questions How long have you been playing golf? Is your game in decline, staying steady, or still rising? • Choose a common endeavor for you: What specific factors challenge an enduring effort?

READING 1 Timothy 6:11-19; Luke 18:18-27, 28-30

The good fight (1 Timothy 6)

What is involved in the "good fight of the faith"? How long should we stay in this fight? Why are those with wealth or privilege given special instructions in this context?

What God can do (Luke 18:18-27)

What got in the way of the ruler following Christ? What would you say comes in the way of your following Christ? How can God help us do what we cannot (that is, save ourselves)?

True longevity (Luke 18:28-30)

What was Peter's claim? What reward did Jesus promise to those who faithfully follow him? How does a view of eternity help us endure?
