

# Play It Where It Lies

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I extend my greetings to everyone. I'd like to say thank you to all the people who sent us cards recently, for whatever reason. You can send me another one too. It's my birthday tomorrow; I'll be 72 years old. Of course, that may offend some people, so I need to be careful.

I have a prop. It's one of the first times I've ever used a prop for a sermon. Actually when I was a technical trainer, I had to take a week-long class on using a prop. The prop I have today is a golf ball. This is a Titleist, not the most expensive Titleist. I can't afford those. I'm going to talk a little bit about golf today and apply that to our lives as God's people. I kind of have to give credit for this message and the whole topic and a large part of the content to a gentleman I met at the Feast. He knows who he is, if he's watching. Hello Dennis!

Golf is a unique game. As far as I know, we don't have many golfers in the audience, but there may be some out there. It's a unique game because the player that wins is the one with the fewest points, not the most. That's the way the game works. Golf, just by its nature, requires a high degree of integrity amongst the players. In fact, often, if you incur a penalty, you're required to call that on yourself. If you ever watch any of the tournaments, which I do on TV on the Golf Channel (Marie goes to watch something else), if you violate a rule, you have to tell on yourself. You can imagine if that were true in other sports. Can you imagine someone in the game of baseball, someone sliding into home plate and tells the umpire, "Well, I really didn't touch third base." That's not going to happen.

Also in the game of golf, there's the demand actually that golfers conduct themselves with dignity and respect towards the other players. Again, if you watch any of the golf games on TV, even the spectators are highly interested in golf or they wouldn't be there. It's kind of like watching paint dry. (laughter) Anyhow, you'll see the officials in the crowds holding up little paddles that say, "SILENCE." Once when I was watching a tournament and I don't know whether it was Tiger Woods or one of the other pros, he was getting ready to make an approach shot, I believe, and somebody's cell phone in the gallery kept going off and he just stopped. Everything stopped and there was silence. That person probably got strangled in the crowd. Nobody saw it.

Another thing about the game also, unlike some other sports, you can't impede your opponent's attempt to make a good shot. You can't heckle or do anything like that in a game of golf. It's not allowed.

So what is the possible application of this game of golf to us today? How are we going to apply this as a topic in the sermon? The answer lies in an analogy that we're going to take from one of the rules of golf. It is a very simple rule, but the way I'm going to

apply this is that we are called to act a certain way, conduct ourselves in a certain way and there is an end in sight. We're on that narrow path. God tells us that. We count the cost before baptism, we counsel before baptism and we count the cost of that. We know there are a lot of things that come along in life and just try to knock us off that path. It happens all the time. One of the local churches that we drive by had something on their reader board the other day; it said, "Life is Messy." Well, that is true. We've all had points in our lives when things were messy for us. We hope that won't knock us off that straight and narrow path that God called us to.

I remember back when our parent Church was breaking up and I know we all went through a certain amount of depression. I still have that cartoon on my desk that I laminated. I actually have it on the bulletin board above my desk. It's a cartoon of Ziggy and he's looking at a "To Do List" and the list said, "Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again." A lot of times we have to do that no matter what is going on in our lives. Just to get back to our analogy for this golf rule, it's very simple but it's a very telling rule. The rule is: **Play It Where It Lies.** Actually if you look in the USGA Rule Book, it lists that as Rule No. 13. Rule 13.1 says that "The ball must be played as it lies except as otherwise provided in the rules." This comes right out of the rule book. There are some exceptions where you can move the ball, but most of the time you play it where it lies.

Rule 13.2 says "The player must not improve or allow to be improved the position or the lie of the ball. You can't take your club and move it over a little bit (although I've played with guys that do that. They're old guys too, like me.) You can't move things unless it's a moveable object. There are very strict rules governing this. In essence, that rule states that a player cannot move the ball to improve his position. You can't do that. We can apply that to our spiritual lives too. In fact, that rule is so explicit that once you decide to play that ball where it lies, you can't move it or do anything to it. If you do that, you will be penalized, either one stroke or two. Again, you don't want to add strokes to your score. You want the least amount of strokes that you can have at the end of the game.

When you think about that, you have one player who tees off and he's going toward the green. Another player tees off and the ball lands in the rough. That doesn't seem fair, but we have to ask ourselves at that point; is golf like life? Is it supposed to be fair? I think a lot of times we get into that mentality that it should be fair.

I'd like to quote something from one of golf's legends. I don't know if you've ever heard of Harvey Penick. He actually had an academy at one time. He was born in 1904 and died in 1995. That makes him almost as old as I am. (just kidding!) But he was considered one of the greatest golf teachers that ever lived. He was one of those unique individuals. A lot of pros would come to him to get refreshed, to get straightened out. You might spend a whole day with him as a professional golfer and he would work on your attitude rather than your game. There's nothing wrong with the mechanics, something would be wrong with the attitude, the mood or the approach. Here's what he said when it came to Rule No. 13: Playing a ball where it lies. I quote:

Golf is not about fairness. The ball is to be played where it sits. There are benefits to this approach. In golf, as in life, obstacles are often placed in our path (Boy, that's true). In overcoming these road blocks, our greatest triumphs occur. There are no good or bad lies, only what is. When we see things without judgment or complaint, we provide ourselves with the greatest chance for success. It doesn't guarantee success, but it does guarantee the opportunity to give our best.

This is a little bit about what Les was talking about. We only have so much time and those opportunities do slip away. So the question for us again is (and I'm going to apply this analogy as we go through here) is it possible that, like golf, life itself is not about fairness? In a lot of cases, it is not. It's possible that when we get angry and bitter over the way life treats us, over the inequities, the injustices we encounter, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity of that chance. Like Les says, that time slips by. We let that go.

Let's look at some of the realities of life. Just looking around at the world today, there are a lot of good people, including God's people. We find ourselves on the wrong end of difficulties and circumstances. That just happens. I remember years ago a story in the newspaper we used to have (was it the Worldwide News?), anyhow, it talked about a member in Africa that suffered a violent murder. This person was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I don't remember all the details. I just remember the grizzly way this member died. I don't know if there was some symbolism to it, but they would put a tire around a person's neck and fill it with gasoline and then light it. That's the way this member was murdered. What is fair about that? Where is the fairness in that?

This last August we saw the shooting at the Sikh Temple. We don't want to forget that in 2005, an individual walked into the Living Church of God in Wisconsin and killed a pastor, his 17 year old son, another 15 year old and five other people, ages 70 something to 55. Where is the fairness in that?

I'm sure most of us have known people with children with a catastrophic disease. How would you like to be like some of the folks we have in our own congregation where a child is battling cancer or the death of an innocent child? It almost staggers you to think of the grief and heartache that a person faces. Where is the fairness in that?

I once knew a Church pastor, this is many years ago and there may be a few members that remember this, but a pastor met his wife in divorce court. Back then, that was devastating and career ending for a minister. As it turned out, he shot his wife right there in the court house and then shot himself. He left a family behind. Where is the fairness in that?

I know a lot of folks in the Church that, over the years, their lives were cut short by tragic accidents. I remember many years ago in the Spokane congregation there was a family that had a head-on collision. Three or four of the family were killed. I think it was one of the parents and the rest were kids.

Another individual not too long ago in UGC in the Spokane area evidently worked as a delivery driver and he was killed by the lift gate on a truck. He was crushed. That's a bad way to die.

Another couple years ago had a house fire and all the kids died in the fire. You name it, all kinds of things like that. Where is the fairness? That's the way we think.

We know that no matter where we look, we can either look at our own lives or just people around us, but the human family suffers tragedies like that all the time. Sometimes it seems like it doesn't make any sense at all. It doesn't matter who we are or what our station in life, when we suffer things like that (the death of a loved one, etc.) the grief and pain and suffering are all the same. It doesn't matter who you are.

Then we think about the seeming injustices in life. There are times when people suffer wrongly. They don't really do anything, despite all their efforts to do things right, to live God's way. People have been lied to, they've been slandered, cheated and wronged at every turn. It just happens. The truth is that the world is just full of those examples. It doesn't matter if you're in the Church or out of the Church, people have lost jobs, had family relationships ruined, marriages ruined, they've been falsely accused, falsely imprisoned and in some cases, falsely executed. Thinking of fairness, all this took place in plain view of God Almighty.

Unfortunately, as we all know, our carnal instincts kick in and we think, where is God in all this? Doesn't He care what my circumstances are? Doesn't He care about whatever I'm suffering at the particular time? When you think about that, nowhere in the Bible does it guarantee us that if we do everything right, everything will turn out okay for us. There's nothing in the Bible that says that all the good people will be blessed and all the bad people will be cursed. It doesn't say that at all. In truth, that's just not how God works. Simply put, things don't always go the way we think they should.

Let's turn to Ecclesiastes because Solomon acknowledges that things don't always go the way we think they should. In Ecclesiastes, chapter 9 Solomon talks about the role that randomness has. We have a universe where God is sovereign and yet He still allows things to happen. Randomness does happen.

***Ecclesiastes 9:11.*** *I returned and saw under the sun that the race [is] not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill;*

The way we feel things should work out.

*11b) But time and chance happen to them all. (NKJV)*

Random things happen. They happen to us and they happen to other people. Being a motorcyclist, you always pick up on things like this when you do a certain sport or

activity. A lady was sitting at a stoplight waiting for the light to turn green. A car came up behind her and slammed into the back and killed her. The lady that was driving the car that hit the cyclist said that she saw the green light but never saw the motorcycle. When they did the investigation, they found fingernail polish all over the airbag. She was doing her nails as she came up to the light. So things like that can happen randomly. We can die of someone's stupidity, someone's negligence.

Let's go to Matthew 5. The point here is God allowing randomness, it happens in our lives and sometimes God orchestrates it. We just don't know. We don't know at all. We were talking about that on the way up how things seems to work out in the scattered groups among God's people and it just seems that things fall into place. Rick mentioned that God is the one moving the chess pieces supernaturally. We don't know. We can't see that. Here in Matthew 5, Christ testifies that His Father is personally responsible for everything that goes on. He knows what is going on all the time. A lot of these things go contrary to what we think would be fairness and justice. But here in Matthew 5:45, the context here is love your enemies. It's talking about a totally different outlook about how God operates and that's the switch that we have to make upon our conversion. But in Matthew 5:45, it says something that gives a little insight into how God looks at things.

**Matthew 5:45.** ... *“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”* (NKJV)

God is totally aware and He is in control of those things at all times. He knows exactly what's going on.

If you ever have any doubts about that, all we need to do is consider the sufferings and trials that have gone on with God's people all the way down through history. We can think about some of those who we think are the great people of faith and what happened to them.

I'd like to look at the examples of the early Church martyrs. In Acts 7 it tells us about Stephen being stoned and all the untold stories there. We don't have those. We only have a few records. What about the things that befell the apostles? There are only two deaths of the apostles mentioned in scripture. We know what happened to Judas; he hung himself, but he was listed among the apostles if you look that up. He didn't do anything other than the wrong that he did. Then we have James the son of Zebedee. John was hacked to pieces. He was the second martyr that was recorded. That's in Acts 12 verses 1 and 2. Those are the only two records that we have. You have to go some place like Foxe's Book of Martyrs. A lot of us have that. I just checked one of the latest editions out of the library. It gives some of the traditional ways the apostles' lives were ended because we know that John was the only one who was recorded to have died of old age. Phillip was scourged and thrown into prison and afterwards he was crucified, according to Foxe's. Matthew was slain with a halberd. If you don't know what that is, it's a battle axe. It has an axe on one side and a spike on the other and

about a six foot handle. James, the half brother of Christ, at the age of 94 was beaten and stoned by a Jewish mob. The sad part about that was they were celebrating a pagan festival at the time. He had his brains bashed out with a fuller's club. Matthias was the guy that replaced Judas, if you recall. He was stoned at Jerusalem and beheaded according to tradition. Andrew, the brother of Peter, was crucified. Thomas was impaled by a spear. Luke, who was not an apostle, was hung. Mark was dragged to pieces in Alexandria. Paul was killed by the sword and probably beheaded. Jude, the half brother of Christ was crucified. Bartholomew was crucified. Simon the Canaanite was crucified. According to Jerome, one of the early church fathers, Peter was crucified upside down at his request, supposedly at Rome, but even Foxe's book says that's probably not true. There's no record of Peter ever being in Rome. But tradition has it that he was crucified upside down.

So we look at all those hideous examples experienced by people we think were God's people. They were God's faithful servants. These things happened to them as a result of their obedience and their uncompromising loyalty to Christ, to God. That is what their calling was and that was the fate they faced. There were no 401(k)s, no retirement plans, none of that for these people. Strictly speaking, there was nothing fair about that, if we look at it from that point of view.

However, if we think about it, there's also no indication in scripture at all that any of these individuals and even the untold ones ever thought that God was unfair with them. They didn't think it was unjust because of what they received. They accepted their fate as part of their calling. In other words, they didn't try to move the ball. They played the ball where it laid. They didn't resent their lot in life either. They didn't compromise their beliefs or anything.

I'm not saying, when I use that simple analogy of playing the ball where it lies, that we have to just grin and bear it. Of course, there are things we can control. There are things that we can take care of. What I'm saying is we don't change because of the circumstances that befall us. If we're farmers like Dale and Laura, they have a bad year, they have a drought. Maybe the following year they have another drought. They have a couple of bad years. They don't put on sack cloth and roll up into a fetal ball and start whining about how unjust everything is. They don't do that. That's the point I'm trying to make.

Turn over to Hebrews 11, because we can see a bit more of this. You probably knew I was going to wind up there, didn't you? Because the apostles weren't alone, and here in Hebrews 11, it talks about some of these great stalwarts of faith and explains that their faith and the way they lived and the way things turned out for them, it never says there would be no suffering. It doesn't say that at all. In Hebrews 11 in verses 32 through 38, we know the author is giving a brief summary, and personally I believe the author was Paul. Let the commentators argue about that.

**Hebrews 11:32.** *And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also [of] David and Samuel and the prophets:*

33) *who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,*

34) *quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong (physically speaking), became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*

35) *Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.*

36) *Still others had trial of mocking and scourging, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.*

Sometimes it worked out and sometimes it didn't, whatever the circumstances were, these folks played their ball where they found it.

37) *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented ... (NKJV)*

Then it goes on to say that they lived in caves, lived in the mountains. They hid out in some cases just to survive. When we think about that and when we look at all these things, our lives today could be just as perilous and fraught with the same kind of trials. We don't know what's going to happen. We may have to cope with some pretty bad adversity in our lives. We don't know. It talks in Revelation about those that were martyred for Christ. I think we all know this, but according to the scriptures, the difficulty of the present times that we find ourselves in, the difficulty of this life's journey is not to be compared with the end result. It just isn't.

Over in Romans 8, Paul talks a little about this. In Romans 8, verses 14 through 18 ...

**Romans 8:14.** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

We're given that at baptism with the laying on of hands and we come up out of that watery grave. It initiates that converted mind. Then it goes on and tells us a little more about that.

15) *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*

Our heavenly Father is looking out for us. We never knew that. We never acknowledged that before. As Les was saying, it takes us a little while to "get" that, but we do get that after a while.

16) *The Spirit Itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...*

We wouldn't even understand that if it wasn't for God's Spirit. We wouldn't understand that we had an opportunity if we lived this life the way we should, to be in God's family.

*17) ... and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with [Him], that we may also be glorified together.*

*18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (NKJV)*

The Greek for "suffering" just means hardship and pain. Didn't Paul know all about that? He certainly did, with the things he suffered. He had no allusions. No matter what came to him, he played his ball where it laid.

We can ask ourselves, is there a way to deal with this unfairness and injustice in the world that we find ourselves in? Is there any way to deal with that? I've got four keys for the way we can manage this. These are fairly simple keys, but simple doesn't mean that it is easy.

The first key is: **Accept the fact that things don't always go your way no matter how just or how righteous you think you are.** We've all heard of the book, The Road Less Travelled. It was written by M. Scott Peck. He was a best-selling author and psychiatrist. He makes an observation about adversity and the human experience, which is interesting. I quote him ...

"Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. Sometimes it takes us a while to get it. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult, once we understand and accept it, then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters. Most do not fully see this truth that life is difficult. Instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or even quietly about the enormity of their problems, their burdens and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if it should be easy. They voice their belief, again noisily oftentimes that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be and that has, somehow, especially been visited upon them, (they're victims) or else upon their families, their tribe, their class, their nation, their race or even their species and not upon others."

Scott goes on to say that "I know about this moaning because I have done my share." Boy, haven't we all! Haven't we all been there? We complain about our situation.

If God's word teaches us nothing else, it tells us that bad and sometimes horrible things happen (and we just saw that) through no fault of our own. It can happen that way. I'd like to go to two biblical examples. One of these examples ended with God's intervention and deliverance, and the other one God allowed it to play out to a violent death. Both of these examples involved people that trusted and had faith in God.

The first one is John the Baptist. In Matthew 11 Christ characterized John the Baptist this way. Christ said about John,

**Matthew 11:11.** *Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist;*

No one greater, and He gives a reference,

11b) *... but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (NKJV)*

He's simply talking about in his physical life, no one served more and sacrificed more than John the Baptist. But how was John rewarded for that righteousness and service? Did he live comfortably and safely? We know that he didn't. As a direct result of him telling the truth to Herod because they indicted him for being married to his brother's wife, John the Baptist was thrown into prison and ultimately beheaded. It tells us a little about that in Mark 6. I won't go through the whole account, but it's interesting that you can find the same account in Matthew 14. Herod is (how shall I phrase it?) maybe a paranoid schizophrenic. Anyhow in the context there in the first part of Mark 6 and also Matthew 14, he is seeing the things that Christ is doing and he says, "This is John. He's risen from the dead!" Then he recounts how he did that.

**Mark 6:17.** *For Herod himself has sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. 18) Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." (NKJV)*

He was quoting a couple of spots in Leviticus; Leviticus 18:16 and Leviticus 20:21, where you can't do that. Then it goes on to say where she wanted to kill him. She wanted to get rid of him as best she could. She wanted to have it done but she just couldn't get it accomplished.

Then going down to verse 22, we know that he threw a big birthday party and had all of his buddies there.

**Mark 6:22.** *And when Herodias' daughter herself ...*

That's Salome. It doesn't really say that in scripture. Josephus has to tell us who that was.

22b) *... came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give [it] to you."*

This was no little girl here. She knew exactly what she was doing. This is a provocative, erotic dance and all in the audience were men. So you can see what's going on there. So Herod made this promise to her and sort of hung himself out there

because of what he had said. So she went to Mom, as we know the story goes, and Mom said, “Get John’s head.”

*25) Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” (NKJV)*

Herod didn’t really want to do that, as we know and as the story goes. He was afraid of John. He was afraid of the way people felt about him. He was a politician as well as a screwball.

*27) Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison,*

He brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl and the girl gave it to her mother. Then we know that the disciples came and took his body away and buried it. This doesn’t seem fair for a man of John’s caliber. Once again, although the Bible doesn’t record it for us, how he reacted to that, but I’m sure as he was dragged out to wherever they beheaded him he didn’t complain or curse God for his circumstance. He had been a servant of God right to his last breath.

The second example is in Daniel. You know where I’m going here too. This is about the three young men who put their trust and faith in God. They were confronted by the most powerful man in the world at that time. I always wondered when looking at this account if this wasn’t a type of the beast power in the end, because we might be brought before a powerful individual. That’s just a thought on my part. Don’t say, “Well, Jack is teaching some kind of doctrine or prophecy here.”

Also the whole story of Nebuchadnezzar is interesting in a way. We know that during that confrontation, they actually acknowledged that they were aware that God might not intervene and rescue them and what they were being threatened with. They also told the king that their loyalty to God wasn’t predicated on the fact that He would save them or not. In other words, they would accept their fate regardless of how it played out. They would play the ball where it laid.

So the second example is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. That is in Daniel 3. We know just briefly that Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree that all of his subjects pay homage to this statue that was about ninety feet tall. How tall is that? About an eight or nine story building; it’s pretty tall. Roughly it works out to about ninety feet. It was probably a statue of him, as we know how those things go. He had music and whenever that was played, everybody would bow down. I don’t know what the music was ... Hail To the Chief? (Chuckle) We know that failure to comply with that decree of the king was being burned alive.

Let’s get into the account in Daniel 3:6.

**Daniel 3:6.** ... *“and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”* (NKJV)

So when they played that anthem, everybody bowed down to the statue except these three young men, and Daniel too. He's somewhere in the background. He could have been somewhere else in the empire. We don't know.

Going now to verse 8.

**Daniel 3:8.** *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews.* (NKJV)

They reminded Nebuchadnezzar of his decree and what would happen. They wanted to get rid of these people.

11) ... *“and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”*

Then it points out ...

12) *“There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province (they were really jealous of these guys) of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: these men, Oh king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.”*

Typical politicians. Cut the throat of the other guys to get rid of them. Do whatever you can. We don't do that overtly now; we do it covertly.

13) *Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So they brought these men before the king.*

The king wanted to give them a second chance as we can see from the context here. This was probably for Daniel's sake and for their sakes too. He had these people operating as leaders.

16) *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “Oh Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.”*

Today we would say, “We don't even need to think about that. We ain't gonna do it! It's clear idolatry. We're not going to do it.”

17) *“If that [is the case], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver [us] from your hand, Oh king.”*

18) *“But if not, let it be known to you, Oh king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”* (NKJV)

They were not deterred by the circumstances that they found themselves in, and it was dire at best. They were being faced with a pretty grizzly death. One thing we can see here is they never lost sight of their devotion and loyalty to God. Their hope was in God the whole time. Notice, too, that they never attempted to diplomatically get out of this. They were in a position where they could have maneuvered around. In their answer to the king, there was no equivocation. They said, "We're not going to do it." It was resolute and unwavering. In other words, they didn't try to improve their position at all. They were fully prepared in that circumstance to play it where it lay, to use that analogy again.

Should it be any different for us? As God's people, we should never let our circumstances (and I know it's easy to say) cause us to lose heart. We should never do that. We should never become discouraged or embittered by what God allows to take place in our lives, because again we don't know what God is orchestrating in the background. It doesn't mean we should go looking for trouble so we can test this. It usually comes on its own.

But this brings us to the second key. The second key is: **Learn to appreciate the value of trials and adversity.** I'm going to use another golf story here. Everybody has heard of Ben Hogan. No? Yes, we have. Sometimes I like to watch on the Golf Channel when they play some of the old tournaments, the old black and white newsreels. It's always interesting. One thing that is not well known about Ben Hogan is that one time he and his wife had a head on collision with a Greyhound bus. That hurt. Ben spent two months in the hospital. It probably took him quite a while to get out of traction and to get the casts off. Then he spent almost a year in rehab. Almost everyone in the golf profession thought his career was over. But you know those injuries that he sustained made him even more determined to come back. Nobody really knew that four years later in 1953 would be the greatest year of his career. After that accident, he won five of the six tournaments he entered, after that horrible accident. In other words, that near tragedy became a platform for triumph for him. He was determined and focused and he came back. He worked hard and he came back. Someone asked him once what drove him to make such a remarkable comeback. Here's his answer, "I couldn't imagine myself not playing golf."

What if we put a little spin on that and use that for ourselves and have that kind of attitude and determination in seeking God's Kingdom? What if we said, "No matter the circumstances, I can't imagine turning my back on God. I can't imagine not being a Christian, just playing my life like it lies."

There are a lot of inspiring stories like that. I like inspiring stories like that. A lot of people ignore them and say, "Well, that person wasn't converted and it doesn't matter." Well, he's a human being and it does matter.

James tells us there is joy in adversity. Again, you know where I'm going here. James tells us there is a point to adversity and trials. Turn to James 1 and verses 1 through 4. I like this in the Amplified.

**James 1:1.** *James a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered: (Amplified)*

We know this is the diaspora, as it is commonly called.

2) *Consider it wholly joyful, my Brethren, whenever you are enveloped in ...*

That's the way the Amplified puts it. I think that's interesting because sometimes we are buried in trials. Sometimes we are buried in adversities.

2b) *... or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations...*

3) *Be assured and understand that the trial [and] proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience.*

4) *But let endurance and steadfastness and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfectly and fully developed without defects, lacking in nothing. (Amplified)*

That gives us a perspective of a converted outlook, so we can see past the circumstances, past the trials that befall us from time to time, and it happens to all of us. It just shows us that the trials and tests, the things that we face have value because they have the potential in the end to make us better. It's like lifting weights. All the trials and things that push against us, just like a resistance weight, builds us spiritually so that we can endure more. They just build that Godly character. They train us. They train us in the skill of overcoming.

Looking at Revelation 3, Christ put a great deal of value on this quality of overcoming. In His message to the seven Churches, He talked about overcoming in every one of them. In Revelation 3:21, it says...

**Revelation 3:21.** *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (NKJV)*

That word "overcome" in the Greek just means to prevail or get the victory. Over what, we can ask. Well, over all the circumstances, the unfair things, the unjust things or otherwise that fall on us. To overcome means not to stop being a Christian, not to stop living the way God tells us to live.

Another thing we need to look at here is that God is not looking for escape artists who run from adversity. Sometimes we do that. We can play our own little games. To use our analogy, God is not interested in us whenever we try to move the ball to a better position in our lives, a more convenient position. Again, using that analogy in a spiritual sense is very simple with God; play it where it lies, no matter where we find ourselves. It's an undeniable fact that we're going to have problems in our lives. We're going to have experiences that seem unfair and unjust. There's hardly any way we can get

around it. It could come in the form of an unseen accident, an act of wrong doing or anything like that.

Let's go over to 1 Corinthians 6, because Paul talks about this a little bit. He exhorts the Corinthian brethren to be willing to suffer wrong. Sometimes we are faced with that. I think we've all gone through that as God's people. It doesn't matter if we've been around a little while or a long while. We've been faced with wrong.

In 1 Corinthians 6, it's interesting what's going on here, because if you look at the context and think about it, what they're doing is the Church people are suing each other. What they're doing is working the system. Evidently it was fairly easy at that point in time to go before a judge or magistrate of some kind and win a case. They were using each other to make money. Paul gets after them for this.

It says in verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 6,

**1 Corinthians 6 7.** *Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another.*

He was ashamed of that. He said your conduct, what you're doing here, is disgraceful.

*7b) ... Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather [let yourselves] be cheated? (NKJV)*

He's telling them to be ready to accept it. Sometimes that's where the ball lies for us. Someone does something wrong to us and it depends on how we respond to that.

Peter goes on to show that a little more, because he uses the example of Christ in this same principal or context actually. Sometimes we have immediate context and sometimes we have remote context. When we look at 1 Peter 2, if you back up in the context, it's talking about how we should conduct ourselves.

**1 Peter 2:19.** *For this [is] commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. (NKJV)*

It's no fault of yours.

*20) For what credit [is it] if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer (you don't deserve it) if you take it patiently, this [is] commendable before God.*

*21) For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:*

*22) Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth. (NKJV)*

He's quoting Isaiah 53. We go there often around the time of the Passover, talking about the character and qualities of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

23) ... who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten ...

So the example He left us is we have a choice of how we will respond to these things.

23b) ... but committed [Himself] to Him who judges righteously;

In everything, He did the will of God. He trusted God in everything.

This brings us to the third key. **What helps us reason with all of this is to understand that things are not always what they appear to be.**

Again, we have an outstanding biblical example of this in the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob. Turn back to Genesis 37. This whole account is told in several chapters in Genesis. We are told that, as a young boy, Joseph had special favor with his father because he was Rachael's only child. We know that his older brothers became extremely jealous of the attention he got and they wanted to get rid of him. We can skip down and look at some various points in Joseph's life and notice the injustice and everything he was subjected to. In Genesis 37 beginning around verse 19 or 20, we know as he was approaching, his brothers were reminded how much they hated him. They wanted to get rid of him so they plotted to sell him into slavery.

Going down to verse 27...

**Genesis 37:27.** *"Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he [is] our brother [and] our flesh."* And his brother listened.

28) *The Midianite traders passed by; so [the brothers] pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites ...*

Then things just keep piling up for Joseph. Going down to Genesis 39 and verse 5, he is falsely accused of rape.

**Genesis 39:7.** *And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." (NKJV)*

So we know as the story goes, he refused.

Then skipping through here, down in verses 11 and 12,

11) *But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house [was] inside... (NKJV)*

She caught him again and Joseph lost his shirt.

12) *...that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.*

Then to add more injury and insult to what was happening to him, in verses 16 and 18, we know that the wife framed him for the rape that he didn't do.

19) *So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused.*  
20) *Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners [were] confined. And he was there in the prison. (NKJV)*

As the story goes on and we have these accounts for examples, we know that he was released from prison and rose in power in Egypt, he was second only to the king. Then his brothers came before him. There was a lot going on in their country with drought and famine. So they came before Joseph. They didn't recognize him at first, of course. It's interesting how Joseph put this really lousy experience and all these injustices and all these things that happened to him in perspective and he explained that what happened to him was because God used him for this.

In Genesis 45 he tells his brothers in verse 5,

**Genesis 45:5.** *"But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." (NKJV)*

He could have spent all those years just whining and crying and moaning and groaning about all the injustices and everything that was done to him, but he didn't do that. Even in Genesis 50:20 it says,

**Genesis 50:20.** *"But as for you, you meant evil against me (talking to his brothers); [but] God meant it for good in order to bring it about as [it is] this day, to save many people alive."*

When you think about that, from that incident we have the entire history of the nation of Israel and what that led to.

It's a testimony to how God works in our lives no matter what the circumstances are, even when things look pretty bleak, God is working there.

Again, going back to the Apostle Paul over in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, Paul reminds us that all the trials and everything we suffer in this life are just preparing us for eternal positions in God's Kingdom. We talked a little bit about that during the Feast. In the context here we can see that Paul is referring to the ministry, the ways they were persecuted, they were hard pressed and persecuted on every side both within and outside the Church. They were struck down even to the point of death, but they always put their trust and faith in God.

**2 Corinthians 4:14.** ... knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present [us] with you. (NKJV)

He knew that God the Father would do the same thing for us, that we would be resurrected.

15) *For all things [are] for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*

16) *Therefore we do not lose heart ...*

Although they came close; Paul mentioned in another place that they were at the point of despair because of all the things that befell them and the things they suffered.

16b) *... Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward [man] is being renewed day by day. (NKJV)*

He had that converted perspective. He knew there was a reason. He knew there was going to be a purpose in the end.

17) *For our light affliction (I like the way he puts that), which is but for a moment (this brief lifetime as Les talked about in the sermonette), is working for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory ...*

He puts a measurement on it so it doesn't even compare. You can't even measure it.

18) *... while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen [are] temporary, but the things which are not seen [are] eternal. (NKJV)*

That's one of the great facts of life that we easily overlook. Everything is temporary.

This brings us to the fourth and final key: **Be grateful for the blessings you have and don't resent the ones you don't have.** Everybody has experienced some bad breaks, some things that are totally beyond our control. Everybody has experienced that. It's how we respond that declares who we are, what drives us, what motivates us. Whether we believe it or not, we do have a choice in the way we respond to the things that happen to us. One of those choices should never involve self pity. All of us can look around and see someone that has things better than we do, if we want to look at it that way from a purely physical view. Do we go around feeling sorry for ourselves because of all that? No at all.

I have another great example of a sports figure and that is Lou Gehrig. I know everyone has heard of him. He is regarded as one of the most talented baseball players of all time. In 1938, Lou Gehrig was diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis); we know it as Lou Gehrig's Disease. We've known people in the Church who have had

that and have died from it. It's an incurable disease. It attacks the nerve cells of the brain and the spine. On July 4, 1939 (I saw an old black & white newsreel on this) Lou Gehrig was before 62,000 people in Yankee Stadium. He was saying goodbye. He fought back tears as he was doing this. It was very touching, emotional and moving to watch. He began to speak to that crowd of 62,000 people and there was total silence as they listened to him. I quote him ...

Fans, for the past two weeks you've been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of this earth. I've been in ball parks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you.

Then he goes on to talk about all the great people, the ball players and other people that he's worked with. Continuing on with his quote,

When everyone down to the grounds keepers and the boys in white coats (he's talking about the officials) remember you with trophies, that's something! When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you and squabbles with her own daughter, that's something! When you have a father and mother who work all their lives so you can have an education and build your body, it's a blessing. And when you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and has shown more courage than you dreamed existed, that's the finest I know. So I close in saying that I might have had a tough break, but I have had an awful lot to live for.

On June 2, 1941, Lou Gehrig died. He was in the prime of his life.

What can be learned from those kinds of examples? Virtually everyone can be on the wrong end of circumstances. Sometimes it can literally drive us to our knees, whatever the case may be. Sometimes we experience things that don't make any sense to us. We can't figure it out from that point. We know people that have lost careers because of office politics and things like that. Some have been afflicted with diseases or other things just because of genetics. You might go in for a routine physical and be faced with a very negative diagnosis and your whole life will change, your priorities will change because you want to get well. You want to heal.

Some people have had their families destroyed because they chose to obey God rather than the traditions of men, rather than some of the religions that some of us came out of.

But in spite of all those terrible things, does it give us the right to curse our lot in life? It really does not, because if we believe in scripture, it tells us no, we don't have a right to do that. Here's how the Apostle Peter put it in 1 Peter 2. I know we read this before, but it bears repeating.

**1 Peter 2:18.** *Servants, [be] submissive to [your] masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. (NKJV)*

This is most likely referring to slavery here. Those things happened at that time. Life wasn't fair and it certainly wasn't fair if you were a slave. But Peter is telling them and us too in principal how to conduct ourselves in those situations.

*19) For this [is] commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. (NKJV)*

The reference to the conscience is we know how God would have us respond to whatever circumstance we are in. We know that.

*20) For what credit [is it] if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this [is] commendable before God. (NKJV)*

It sounds like God wants us to conduct ourselves in a right way no matter what happens, no matter what. Play the ball where it lies. Play the ball where you find it, not trying to re-position it, not trying to improve our position, however we find, we conduct ourselves accordingly.

*21) For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:*

Sometimes those steps are not easy at all. Verse 22 quotes Isaiah 53 again.

*22) Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth,  
23) ... who (speaking of Christ), when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed [Himself] to Him who judges righteously ... (NKJV)*

Boy, if we could have that kind of character.

*24) ... who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.  
25) For you were like sheep going astray (sometimes we feel like we are as helpless as that in some circumstances) but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (NKJV)*

That's where we should put our trust and faith.

One last golf story; this is about Bobby Jones. This guy was a golf legend in the 1920s. I like to watch the golf movies too. There was a movie made about Bobby Jones called The Stroke of Genius. I don't know if you have ever seen that or not. Don't run out and rent it. Anyhow, it's about his ability and it's interesting in light of playing the ball where

it lays. One time he was in the rough and part of your setup before you hit the ball is you ground your club. You put your club down right behind the ball. When he did that, the ball moved. Nobody saw it but him. He called an official over and said, "The ball moved." It improved his position. The official said, "Well, nobody saw it. It's not a big deal." Bobby said, "I saw it." He was penalized two strokes. He lost that tournament by one stroke. That's the kind of integrity this man had.

Here's a story that I want to get at. One of his friends tells this story and again, I'm quoting his friend. It says, "Bobby Jones had a sense of peace, dignity and grace about him that was almost eerie. He was one of the most self composed men I have ever met. Even when his formerly athletic body was ravaged by an awful degenerative disease of the spinal cord (doesn't say what it was) he was a model of strength, fortitude and dignity. In 1971, the year he died, Bobby was in his cabin at the Augusta National Golf Club. At that time he was visited by a friend who became distraught by Jones's condition. The man began to cry and complain how unfair it was that Jones had to suffer in such a way, such a great golfer. Jones quickly chastised his friend saying, 'Now, now, we won't have any of that. You know the rule. We're supposed to play the ball as we find it.'" That was his approach and philosophy to life.

Our calling is not a game. It is deadly serious. We have to play our ball where we find it in that sense. We have to live our lives no matter where we find ourselves, what the circumstances are, never turning our back on God no matter what. The purpose of this message and what I've tried to express here is really quite simple. It's embodied actually in three truths and here they are:

1. God never promised life would be easy;
2. He never promised life would be fair; and
3. What He did promise in the end is the life He has called us to would be worth it.