

The Oldest Winner!

by Wayne Goff

Sunday, May 23, 2001, Phil Mickelson at the age of 50 became the oldest winner in all of golf history to win a major tournament. That is an amazing feat, and few people believed that he could do it. So what lessons can we learn from him?

Determination

If you're not a golf fan, then you could probably care less about this amazing feat. But there are several lessons to be learned from it that have a *spiritual* application. The first is that you have to **want** to do it. Most professional golfers at the age of 45+ are ready to slow down and call it a career. It's a real grind mentally and physically to play golf for a living. Yes, a good golfer can become a millionaire, but at what price?

Phil loves the game of golf, loves to compete, and best of all, loves to win, *especially now against the younger guys*. The application *spiritually* is that **IF** you want to learn God's Word, then you can. **IF** you want to be a Bible class teacher or preacher, then you can. **IF** you want to be a faithful member of the local church, then you can. If you want to go to heaven, then you can (read **Romans 10:6-8**). We have a song we used to sing with the words "salvation has been brought down." That is the message of Romans 10:6-8. God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Salvation is within our grasp. We just have to **want** to go to heaven more than anything else. "*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God*" (**Colossians 3:1**).

Sacrifice

You don't win any major championships of any kind without a lot of hard work and sacrifice. And that is even more true with age. Phil explained that a few years ago he entered a physical regimen that included working harder in the gym to strengthen his body, going on a stringent diet to reach his proper weight, and practicing golf more diligently with his golf coaches. Every golfer has to do much of the same things these days, but Phil explained that at his age "you have to do a little bit more."

Apparently no other golfer has been willing to go through such sacrifices at that age just to win a golf tournament. One of those sacrifices included **fasting for 36 hours each week!** And Phil gave credit to the health industry for learning how to properly exercise and diet to reach one's maximum physical potential. The apostle Paul made an application to sports which fits perfectly here. "*And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown*" (**1 Corinthians 9:25**). Who wants to be "*temperate in all things*"? Those who want to win. Victory comes with a price, and too many of us want victory at a lesser cost. Paul's point is that obtaining that "*imperishable crown*" is worth **every sacrifice one has to make!**

The Christian life *begins* with sacrifice, if we would just stop and think about it. Jesus said, "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*" (**Matthew 16:24**). Jesus also said, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*" (**Matthew 10:37**).

The Christian life *continues* with sacrifice: "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*" (**Romans 12:1**). Unfortunately, many denominations claiming to be "the Lord's church" offer salvation and Christianity at a much cheaper price! Few are willing to sacrifice much of anything! Some brethren think sitting through a 45-minute sermon is a big sacrifice!

"What have you missed the most with your stringent regimen?" Phil was asked. He simple answer, which I knew before he said it, was "food." You have to eat well, eat less, and sacrifice more to compete at a high level at his age.

He Thanked His Wife

Phil repeatedly gave credit to his wife, Amy, for winning this particular major championship. He didn't go into details, but my guess would be that it went something like this. As Phil began to age, and the younger players were passing by him, he undoubtedly began to worry, moan or complain. A good wife at that point would say something like "Well Phil, if you really want to compete and win at your age, then you're going to have to work harder!" To his credit, he listened to his wife and began to do all the things necessary to win. And so it is in the spiritual realm if you are fortunate enough to have a good mate.

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