

Our local sporting goods store has an entire section devoted to golf. You can buy the new TaylorMade R7 CGB Driver for \$999.99 (for you non-golfers, that's ONE golf club). You'll probably want to get the Nike Sphere Dry Body Mapping Polo (that's a shirt) for \$74.99. And while you're at it you might as well pick up the adidas Tour 360 LTD golf shoes for \$249.99.

But there's one golf accessory that no amount of money can buy there. Matter of fact, you can't buy it anywhere. The old pro Sam Snead put it best: "You can't go into a shop and buy a good game of golf." If a Saturday golfer finds his or her tee shots continually drifting into the woods, the problem isn't that they don't have a \$1,000 golf club. They need to get better. They need to practice their swing. Top-notch equipment might certainly help, but in the end a good golf game can only be achieved through a combination of ability and practice.

Sometimes it might seem that our efforts in this life are like golf shots that sail off the mark. We know we ought not to complain or argue, but we do. We know we ought to be content, but we're not. We know we ought to be forgiving, but we're find it so difficult. We make attempts to do what's right, but so often we miss. That's one way the Bible actually describes sin: "missing the mark." God sets up a target for us in his commandments. But as sinners we miss the target.

Arnold Palmer once gave some tongue-in-cheek advice to his fellow golfers: "I have a tip that can take five strokes off anyone's golf game. It is called an eraser." But isn't that just what God did for us in sending us a Savior? He erased our sins that stood against us, and at the same time he instilled in us an ability to obey him. But that ability isn't a perfect ability. It won't be until we reach heaven. And it will deteriorate unless we practice.

Ability and practice. It's that same combination that God uses to bring about sanctified, Christian living in our lives. God inspired the apostle Paul to write to the Philippians: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (2:13) He has forgiven us. He has empowered us with his Spirit. And he gives us opportunities to practice our Spirit-driven abilities: abilities to love and serve, to forgive and make peace, to be content and patient.

God is working in you today. So practice your swing. Out of love and thanks for the Savior who rescued you from sin, keep your eyes open for the opportunity to use the abilities he's given you. Speak a kind word to someone who needs it. Forgive someone who doesn't deserve your forgiveness. Look around at all that God has given to you and rejoice in his great love for you.

Prayer: Dear God, I have failed in my attempts to love other people as myself. I haven't even loved you as I ought. But you still love me. I thank you for your forgiveness and that your Spirit lives in me. Help me to more and more be the person you created me to be, that others may be blessed through me. In your Son's name I pray, Amen.

*Written by Pastor Steve Schmidt, Ascension Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, NC. Worship with us on Sundays at 9AM. Check out our website at [www.welsalc.com](http://www.welsalc.com).*

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