

Practice, Practice, Practice
by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President
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February 2007

One of the few jokes I can remember and tell goes something like this. The great 20th century concert pianist Artur Rubenstein was approached on the street in New York City and was asked, "Pardon me sir, but how do I get to Carnegie Hall?" Rubenstein replied, "Practice, practice, practice."

It's true in other of life's venues as well. It's no surprise that the professional golfer who spends the most time on the practice tee is none other than Tiger Woods. The late Walter Payton, the great hall of fame running back of the Chicago Bears, was renowned for his rigorous off-season workout regimen. I recently heard a radio interview with Herb Alpert (remember the Tijuana Brass?). Alpert said he still practices the trumpet at least four hours a day. The most accomplished artists and athletes don't get that way by accident. Greatness requires a combination of skill and disciplined hard work.

John Wesley talked about "moving on to perfection." You certainly don't get there without rigorous, disciplined practice of the Christian faith.

The good news is that in this season of Lent, all of us can practice the spiritual disciplines that we are called to observe in this season of preparation for the great celebration of Easter.

Some of us choose to give up something near and dear to us for Lent. Our daughter Carrie told her mother on the way to church last Sunday that she was giving up sugar. Good for her! Others use these forty days for increased prayer, study, reflection and meditation on what it means to follow Jesus.

One of the spiritual disciplines we are called to observe, especially in this season, is giving. And like everything else, giving takes practice. Most of us don't become accomplished givers – tithers – overnight. Just like Tiger Woods, we need to work our way toward the goal, on the way to perfection. Like most of us, John Wesley wasn't always a tither, but by the end of his life he had become a tither several times over.

And what better time to start the practice of tithing than in this season of Lent?

As I have written before in this space, I have never met an unhappy tither. Tithers are people who understand that giving is more about spiritual discipline than it is about finances. Tithers are people who give until it feels good, rather than people who give until it hurts. Tithers understand that giving is a joyful expression of our response to the God who has given us all that we are and all that we have.

So during this season of Lent, give it a try. If you're not already a tither, try it for the next few weeks. See how it goes. It may mean giving up something. But I am convinced that through the prayerful ordering of our lives, we can find joy and meaning in the act of giving. It's not just about giving up sugar. It's about finding meaning in the joy of reflecting the image of our creator, the ultimate giver. And it takes practice.

Practice, practice, practice.

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