



Links Players

LINKS PLAYERS MAG 5: STANKO'S TRIALS

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 2:3, NIV)

PAUL STANKOWSKI HAD A FRONT-ROW SEAT for the greatest uptick on the PGA Tour during our lifetime. Arnold Palmer brought fans and money to the game, and Jack Nicklaus drew our attention to the major championships, but it was Tiger Woods who truly rebuilt the game into one of athletic domination.

Some players saw Tiger firsthand and said to themselves, "I'm finished." Stankowski, a two-time Tour winner by then, took a more confident approach, telling a reporter, "I think it's time to step it up and take it to the next level."

Little did Stanko know.

Little did he know that injuries would keep him from playing altogether for months at a stretch. Little did he know that even when he could play, getting his game where he wanted it was no cinch. Little did he know that he would suffer a heart attack before age 50.

Invincible as we want to be, this is the way of the world. When I was first diagnosed with cancer in 2016, some key words entered my mind. I believe the Lord put them there. They were these: "The information is not the outcome." Of course, what I wanted this to mean was that even if the doctors tell me I have one year to live, the Lord may sustain me for 10. But just as well it could mean that moments after leaving the hospital from a life-saving surgery, I might be run down by a semi. My days could end in an instant.

I realize that all of this may make you uncomfortable. It's so wild, so uncertain. It suggests that you will be taken through territory you don't want to cross. "In this world," Jesus said, "you will have tribulation." This is not one of the verses they put in the promise stack you purchase at the Bible bookstore. But there it is. Like the apostle Paul's thorn in his flesh. Relentless and painful.

But staring us in the face is James' teaching that trials testing our faith produce in us perseverance, carrying us to a mature and complete end. Maybe you're no more interested in such a life than you are in enduring hardship like a good soldier. Yet the apostles never spurned suffering. In it, they always found connection with Christ, our suffering Savior, and trusted that our result would be like his: life. In him we gain ground even when it looks like we're losing. In him, we're resurrected.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study can be found at <https://youtu.be/J3ONu02EOKM>. The Links Players magazine article with Paul Stankowski is available here: <http://www.linksplayers.com/articles/paul-stankowski>.

Opening questions What is the hardest physical or emotional trial you have had to endure? • Are you willing to learn from the hard times of life, or do you do all you can to push them away?

READING Psalm 6; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Desperate pleas (Psalm 6)
What varieties of difficulty did David list here? How were these affecting him? Where did he turn in his desperation?

Afflictions, purposes, attitude (1 Corinthians 12)
What reason did Paul give for the thorn in his flesh? Does it unnerve you that God might get your attention this way?

Theologians are unsure what Paul's thorn was. What are some possibilities that make sense according to your observations and experiences?

How was Paul's prayer for the thorn's removal answered?

What can we take away from Paul's overall response to the affliction?
