



LINKS PLAYERS DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Links Players

And There But For The Grace Of God

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. (Titus 3:7, NLT).

It was sacred St. Andrews—the Open of 1970. My all-time favorite announcer, Henry Longhurst, was nearly drunk with prophetic fear (maybe literally) as Doug Sanders approached the 18th green, seeming to know already that poor Doug would three-putt and lose to Jack Nicklaus in a playoff the next day. You know the tragic story.

Henry's commentary was, in my view, the greatest moment in golf announcing. When Doug's 30-inch putt slipped past on the right side, Henry stumbled and mumbled in his beautiful English brogue:

"... and there it is. And there but for the grace of God..."

Henry was quoting, as so many do without knowing the details, a Godly man named John Bradford in 1555. While watching a criminal being led to execution, the saintly Bradford said, "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford."

Ironically, this same man was led to a martyr's death later that year when Bloody Queen Mary burned him at the stake for believing in the Grace of God.

But now, fast-forward past 1555 and 1970 to the year 2000. My friend, Dave Rathcamp, met Sanders and was in the process of leading Doug to Jesus. He met with him every week to discuss the "grace of God," which was Doug's only hope.

Dave knew I was a golfer, so he asked me, "You wanna play golf with Doug Sanders sometime?" "Are you kidding me? Of course."

So... it happened. I flew to Houston for a memorable day. As lunch concluded, I found the courage to ask Doug if he ever thought about that 3-putt at St. Andrews. Without a blink, he looked me in the eye and said in his Georgia drawl, "Just ever' damn day".

But that lunch helped me know that I will see Doug Sanders in heaven someday.

How is that possible? Wasn't he the womanizer who drank too much and was famous for seeking attention in all the wrong places? How is it possible that a notorious 'sinner' like Doug, both before and after his 1970 encounter with Nicklaus and St. Andrews, could be sitting today in heavenly places with Jesus Himself?

Isn't heaven for saints and hell for sinners?

Oh no... it doesn't work that way. Read your Bible. Sinners like Doug love the Truth found in Paul's statement about himself. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and I was the worst of them all." (I Tim 1:15). This is good news for men like Doug Sanders.

"For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people.... because of His grace, He made us right in His sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life." (Titus 2:11, 3:7).

I hope to meet Henry Longhurst and Doug Sanders in the heavenly realm. Doug convinced me on that day that he knew he had been forgiven- the grace of God had indeed shown up — too late to win a British Open, but not too late to save a sinner. They don't give mulligans on the 18th green of an Open, but "the grace of God" is God's mulligan for all who trust and follow Him.

I hope my beloved Henry Longhurst found that same assurance and can say with all the rest of us sinners, "There but for the Grace of God, go I."

Prayer: "Thank you, Jesus, that no one earns salvation. It is a gift of God, not of works that any man may boast. Indeed, there but for your wonderful Grace, go I. Amen."

—

Tim Philpot

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