



Links Players

Own the Penalty

Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6, NLT)

Before teeing off in our club championship, we were told that severe weather was expected and that we would be playing lift, clean, and place within one scorecard length in our own fairway.

Through eight holes, I was 2 under par. On No. 9, my ball spun off the green and onto the fringe. I placed a tee beside my ball, laid my putter down next to the tee, and placed my ball within one putter length.

Before placing the ball, I asked the three other players if the process was good, meaning the angle was not closer to the hole.

Each guy said it was good. After two-putting for par, I followed the exact same procedure—with the same result—on hole No. 11.

However, on No. 12, as I was placing my tee next to the ball to lift, clean, and place, I suddenly realized that my placements on Nos. 9 and 11 had been wrong. I blurted out, “Are you serious, Jose?”

All three guys asked, “What’s wrong?”

I said, “We’re playing a scorecard length, and I just realized my placements on Nos. 9 and 11 were the length of my putter.”

One guy said, “I am so sorry. I totally forgot, or I would have said something.”

Another said, “Don’t worry. It’s not that big of a thing.”

My reply to the first was, “It’s not your fault. I simply forgot, and it’s my responsibility.”

To the second, I said, “It’s a big thing, and I broke the rule.”

The last response inspired this devotional. He said, “Yeah, I knew you were taking a wrong drop, but I didn’t want to call you out and be ‘that guy.’”

I replied, “‘That guy’ would have saved me four penalty strokes, and I would have been very thankful to him.”

Those four penalty strokes turned a 69 into a 73. A final-round 71 left me with a total of 144—two shots behind the winners’ total of 142.

“If only I had had a faithful friend” would have been an easy way to play the blame game. After all, they had approved both placements. But when the round was over, it was my scorecard, my decision, and my responsibility.

Would it have been helpful to have a companion instruct, guide, and advise me before I made that decision? Absolutely. But ultimately, we have to own our mistakes.

The same is true in our lives. We can surround ourselves with people who overlook our sin, remain silent about our compromises, and tell us only what we want to hear.

A faithful friend loves us enough to tell us the truth, even when the truth hurts.

Being a faithful friend requires the fruit of the Spirit—especially love, gentleness, kindness, and self-control—to be evident in our lives.

Sometimes love speaks up. Sometimes kindness warns us. Sometimes faithfulness risks an uncomfortable conversation.

Losing the championship didn’t cause me to lose sleep, but it did remind me that I am accountable for my decisions. In golf and in life, our companions will not answer for us.

When it’s all said and done, we are responsible before God for the choices we make.

Thankfully, we don’t have to hide our failures. Jesus knows every mistake and every sin, yet He offers forgiveness because of His finished work on the cross.

When we confess and turn to Him, He covers our sin and clothes us in His righteousness. He took our penalty of death.

May we have the humility to own our mistakes and the courage to be faithful friends.

You may be “that guy” or “that girl”—the friend God uses to save someone from the ultimate penalty: eternal separation from a holy God.

Prayer: Father! You are a faithful friend to us. Please help us to be a faithful friend to those you bring into our lives.

Jose Alvarez

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