

Staying the Course (Integrity - Chapter 11)

n/a

Ready:

Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14

Set

Depending on the golf course, the average PGA golfer will take roughly 280 shots during a four-round tournament. Within each one of those swings there is an enormous amount of pressure. For some players, one shot could make the difference between picking up a weekend paycheck and making an early exit—the difference between retaining a tour card and going back to qualifying school.

Aaron Baddeley fully understands all of the ramifications that accompany golf's micromanaged scoring system. He has missed the cut by one stroke and made the cut by the same paper-thin margin. Baddeley never takes his position on the PGA for granted but somehow finds relief from the inherent stress with a special technique.

“There are times that I get over a shot, and I'm a little worried about it,” Baddeley says. “Then you're like, *I don't have a spirit of fear. I've got a spirit of power, love and a sound mind.* Sometimes I write Scriptures on my glove as a reminder. Sometimes you can get to a certain shot, and you're a little wary about it, and you can quote Scripture, and get a peace about it.”

Baddeley's paraphrasing of 2 Timothy 1:7 is a far cry from the lackadaisical attitude toward prayer he maintained throughout most of his life as a teenager and young adult in his early twenties. Baddeley actually had parents who set a solid Christian example for him.

Born in Lebanon, New Hampshire, Baddeley's father, Ron, worked as chief mechanic for Mario Andretti's race team. The family moved back to its native Australia when the young Baddeley was nearing his third birthday. To this day, Baddeley enjoys dual citizenship, though he represents Australia in professional golf. Back in Melbourne, he spent the formative years of his childhood in a family that regularly attended a church where his father was an elder and his mom was a Sunday School teacher.

"I remember giving my life to Christ when I was 12 years old," Baddeley says. "I was at a youth outreach where a famous Australian rules football player was speaking. But after that, I just went through the motions."

While a relationship with God quickly became an afterthought, Baddeley's strong desire for athletic competition became king in his life. He started playing golf under the guidance of his grandmother Jean when he was eight years old, but he didn't get serious about the sport until he was 14. Up until that point, Baddeley says, he was a serious cricket player.

But once golf finally won him over, Baddeley grew more and more obsessed with it. Not only did he work tirelessly on the fundamentals of the game, but he also began studying the game's history and developing a thirst for knowledge of golf's biggest stars.

"I knew everyone, especially the big names," Baddeley says. "I watched so much golf, it was ridiculous. I could tell you every shot Nick Price hit in the last round when he won the PGA [Championship] at Southern Hills [in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1992]. I could tell you the commentary. Ever since I started playing golf, I just loved watching it."

By the time Baddeley was 18, he was one of Australia's top amateur golfers. That fact was solidified when he won the 1999 Australian Open—the youngest player ever to do so. But not long after his crowning achievement, Baddeley fell into a slump. He admits that 10 months later, he was tempted to "quit the game." Instead, he decided to recommit himself to golf and defended his title by winning the 2000 Australian Open—this time as a professional.

Five months later, he played in his first PGA Tour event at the Honda Classic. One might assume the college-aged youngster would have been just a little bit intimidated by the prospect of playing alongside golf's greatest players. But that was far from the truth. When he was younger, Baddeley had played with legendary Australian golfer Greg Norman. He also befriended Phil Mickelson; and the two practiced together in Scottsdale, Arizona, on a regular basis.

But it didn't take long for his new life in the United States to lose its luster. During the 2000 season, Baddeley struggled to keep the pace and made the cut just once in nine starts. Perhaps the best moment during that stretch on the PGA Tour was receiving a special invitation to play in the Masters (the youngest player to ever receive such an honor) and the thrilling opportunity to play a round with Tiger Woods. Otherwise, a tie for fifty-seventh place at the Honda Classic was the one consolation in an otherwise disappointing season.

"This was going to be the best year of my life," Baddeley remembers. "This is where I wanted to be. This is where I'd dreamed of being for six years. I came over and in 10 months I wanted to quit the game. It turned out to be the worst year of my life."

In 2001, Baddeley regained his winning stroke in time to capture the Greg Norman Holden International—a tournament hosted by and named after his boyhood hero and mentor. He also played in nine PGA Tour events that year, but barely fared better than the year before—by making two cuts. At that point, any reasonable golfer might have stressed out over form, training or even equipment. Instead, Baddeley says it was an unusual life decision that sparked positive change.

"In 2002, I felt like God was calling me to take a dating vow," Baddeley says. "I felt like He was asking me to give up dating for a season. So for the next six months, I didn't go out with

any girls. I did it without even thinking. That was the point where God really got a hold of me. That's where I really started to press in and seek Him.

Baddeley stayed in touch with his pastor from Australia, who mentored him through the process by email. Throughout the six months, he learned invaluable nuggets of wisdom about dating and about himself. But most importantly, Baddeley began experiencing a personal relationship with God like never before.

"From then on, I have been growing closer to the Lord," he says. "It was during that time of committing to Him and learning more about what the Bible said and about God that I learned how personable God is and how much He enjoys someone who is committed to Him. To maintain the vow and not break it, I had to be obedient, and it was through the obedience that I learned so much."

Not only did Baddeley grow spiritually and emotionally during those six months, but he also found that his golf game began improving as well. On the 2002 Nationwide Tour, he finished runner-up in three tournaments and earned his way onto the PGA Tour by placing tenth on the circuit's money list. Baddeley admits that the Nationwide Tour wasn't exactly where he wanted to be, but quickly realized that God had orchestrated the location and timing all along.

"That point was the best year of my life," Baddeley recalls. "Having a strong relationship with the Lord allowed me to have peace and happiness and enjoyment. The difference was obviously in my improved relationship with Christ. My friends noticed too, and I was able to share with them that the difference was Jesus."

As Baddeley's relationship with God grew, so did his success on the PGA Tour. As a rookie in 2003, he claimed three top-10 finishes, including the Sony Open in Hawaii, where he lost a two-hole playoff to Ernie Els. In 2004, Baddeley again narrowly missed his first tour victory with a second-place finish to Heath Slocum at the Chrysler Classic of Tucson, but he did maintain his PGA status by finishing in the top 125 on the money list.

In 2005, Baddeley continued his slow rise as one of the tour's next young contenders. But the dating vow he had taken three years earlier—and the lessons learned from it—finally paid off when he married the love of his life, Richelle, on Easter Sunday.

"I know that everything's in His time," Baddeley says. "You've got the promises of the Word that all things work for the good. When things don't go your way, you can be like, *All right, there's something going on here*. 'Lord, show me what You're trying to teach me.' The promises in the Word are what give you so much peace."

For Baddeley, 2006 was truly a breakout year. One year and one day after his wedding, he claimed his first PGA Tour title at the Verizon Heritage. The Sunday morning before the final round, Baddeley spoke at a sunrise service near the eighteenth green. After the win, his faith in Jesus became the centerpiece of every interview. The 2007 season was even more successful, with a second PGA Tour victory taking place at the FBR Open in Phoenix. Baddeley ended the year with more than \$3 million in tournament earnings and finished sixth in the inaugural FedEx Cup standings.

Suffice it to say, Baddeley has been at both ends of the spectrum. He has missed the cut and lost his shot at the big time. On the flipside, he has won prestigious tournaments, earned big paychecks and has shared the course with golf's greatest players. The precarious balance

between success and failure has helped the young Aussie fully understand the biblical truth found in Romans 8:38-39.

“Nothing can separate us from His love,” Baddeley says. “You could shoot 85-85, and you can go to the prayer closet, and He’s going to be there. He’s still going to want to talk to you. He’s still going to want to hold you. In this day and age, performance is something that people struggle with, and I struggle with it as well. I wouldn’t say I’m immune to it at all. There are times that you put a value on your performance.”

In those times when Baddeley is tempted to let the insecurities of human nature creep back into his heart, he reminds himself of his personal definition of integrity: “To live according to God’s Word.”

Baddeley’s first real-life examples of biblical integrity were his parents. More recently, he has relied on the models found in his wife, Richelle, and in close friend John Bevere—a noted author, speaker and minister. Others that Baddeley has learned from include fellow PGA star Tom Lehman, longtime PGA chaplain Larry Moody, and Tommy Barnett, senior pastor at First Assembly of God in Phoenix.

And one of the biggest lessons he’s extrapolated from that impressive cast of characters is the importance of maintaining a high level of integrity in order to open the door to people’s hearts.

“Live what you preach,” Baddeley says. “As a Christian, you’re always held under a microscope. You really have to be careful. You’ve got to live upright and holy. That’s the biggest witnessing tool. It’s just what James [2:26] is saying: “Faith without works is dead.” You’ve got to live what your faith is.”

Baddeley says that his biggest tool in reaching others is simply telling them the testimony of his life. “They can’t argue with it because it’s my testimony,” he adds.

But even more important to Baddeley is that he constantly does his best to go where God is leading him, and that means listening to that ever-present Guide.

“I definitely want to listen to what’s going on inside, what the Holy Spirit is trying to say,” Baddeley says. “Then I just tell them about Jesus. I often start out talking about church. I’ll ask them where they go to church, and if they don’t go, it opens the door.”

Another way Baddeley uses his celebrity status to reach people with the gospel is through his website, badds.com. Originally, his manager, Paul Galli, suggested the idea of a website, and Baddeley ran with the concept. The Internet site has since seen significant results, including one man who was contemplating suicide but changed his mind and gave his life to Christ after visiting the online hub.

“The Lord gave me ideas about what to put on there and doing daily Bible readings,” Baddeley says. “A lot of things I write on there are just from my own journaling. I’m not one to shy away from putting things on there that are strong. Too often, we preach about all of the good stuff, and we forget that the Lord is still a judge. I put on there what’s on my heart. It’s really a great tool, because anyone can click on, and it’s sort of like a 24-hour ministry.”

But Baddeley knows too well that effective outreach can be strengthened or weakened by the believer’s integrity or lack thereof. That’s why one of his favorite passages of Scripture is 1

Peter 1:15-16: "But, as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy."

"I love this because it's the Lord's call on all our lives," Baddeley says. "He is our example. He is our standard. He is who we need in our life to live a life of integrity and one that pleases God. I am supposed to strive to live my life like Jesus did."

And while Jesus is the ultimate, most perfect example of integrity, Baddeley is also inspired by the stories of King David, who is known for being a mighty warrior, a talented writer, an intense lover of God, and a man who struggled with his own humanity.

"David had a passion for God—to be close and intimate with Him," Baddeley says. "In Psalm 27:4, he wrote, 'One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.' David loved the Lord and was committed to Him, but when he messed up and sinned, he was not prideful but confessed it to the Lord and repented. David's heart was to please the Lord and to be close to Him" (NKJV).

One thing Baddeley has come to understand early in his life is the importance of commitment. It requires commitment to excellence in training and practice in order to become an elite golfer. It likewise requires commitment to make a modern marriage work. And commitment especially applies when it comes to one's character and the upholding of one's relationship with God.

In the third chapter of Philippians, the apostle Paul speaks the language of an athlete. In verses 13 and 14, he talks about the goal that has yet to be achieved. Paul suggests that in order to win "the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus," believers must live with consistent determination (v. 14). He goes on in verse 16 to say that "we should live up to whatever [truth] we have attained."

For Baddeley, that definitive call to a life of righteousness comes through loud and clear.

"You need to be committed to walking in integrity and walking in the God's commands," he says. "That commitment is needed. I feel what challenges me is that I need to be ready to be committed all the time, not some of the time, but 100 percent of the time. I need to be committed to integrity and God's commands, because that's what He expects from us. I feel like it's also important to make sure my heart is committed daily to walking along the right path."

According to Baddeley, the blessings that come from a life of integrity are innumerable and can be found in the here and now and in the ever after. But just as countless as those gifts can be, the dangers of turning from God's holiness are likewise immeasurable and something that all followers of Christ should avoid at all costs.

"By breaking commitments, we sin against God and against what He calls us to be," Baddeley says. "When we allow sin to enter our life by breaking commitments, we give the devil a foothold in our life. The more we sin, the easier it becomes, and the more of a habit it becomes. Then before we know it, we are walking in the wrong direction, and our integrity is no longer intact; and we are living a life that does not please God."

In the world of high-stakes professional sports, Baddeley has seen the highest highs and the lowest lows. He knows the difference between a life that relies on God and a life that trusts in

oneself, and his level of commitment is no longer determined by external facts of life. Baddeley is more concerned with knowing what God has to say about various situations instead of being prodded by success or shaken by failure.

That's why the personable young golfer says the best way to learn about integrity and the most effective tools for a long-term spiritual commitment is simply to read the pages of God's Word and to spend significant amounts of time in prayer.

By doing this, God's Word becomes implanted in our heart, Baddeley says. When that happens, we are able to live a life of integrity and a life that pleases God. When we commit ourselves to being obedient to God's Word, we can all walk in a life of integrity.

Go

1. Read 2 Timothy 1:7. Can you describe some situations that cause you to worry? What reassurance does this scripture give you for times like that? What do you think might be the significance of Jesus' reference to the spirits of power, love and sound judgment?
2. Baddeley tells about a dating vow he took in 2002 that led to him not dating for six months. Has God ever taken you to extreme measures? If so, what kind of impact did they have on your relationship with Him?
3. Baddeley says, "By breaking commitments, we sin against God and against what He calls us to be." Can you think of a time when you broke a commitment you made to God? How did that make you feel? What do you think is the connection between commitment and integrity? What are some ways you can stay accountable to your commitments?
4. One of Baddeley's favorite Bible heroes is David. Read Psalm 27:4. What does this passage suggest was the key behind David's devotion to God? How can you take David's example of commitment in spite of his imperfection and apply it to your life?
5. Read Philippians 3:13-14. Why do you think it is dangerous to dwell too much on the past? How does this passage inspire you to focus on the future? What part does commitment and integrity play in this process of pursuing the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus?

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Bible Reference:

1 Peter 1



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