

Playing the Same Game

When I was in college down in Searcy, AR I really got in to playing disc (Frisbee) golf. I played almost every day either by myself or with friends. 18 holes would usually take about an hour on that course. We usually would play two 18 hole rounds. I really felt like we were getting good. Our scores were improving and we were getting pretty competitive even with strangers who we happened to join on the courses we would play.

After college, I spent a year in Illinois raising money and biding my time before I moved to Scotland for my mission work. While there I got involved with some players in the Springfield area. It was quite different playing with them. They were way better than me. This didn't surprise me. I knew that while I was competitive with my friends, I was not at all competitive with others.

That wasn't the hardest part though. I anticipated the skill gap, but I didn't anticipate the fact that I hadn't been playing by the proper rules. There were many habits I had formed by playing alone that were not correct. These guys were very quick to let me know. They were kind about it, but it was a huge adjustment and I really struggled to score well while trying to play by these "new" rules.

I wonder if how I felt was similar to how the Gentiles must have felt when becoming part of largely Jewish churches. There were many things that they had lived and done in worship to their gods. They had learned from people like Paul what was acceptable and unacceptable in worshipping Jesus. It must have been quite the shock to hear from Jewish Christians that the way they had been worshipping was all wrong. They needed to relearn how to live this new life.

Even though there were several different technical rules to disc golf that we weren't following, we were still playing the same game. We were all under the same "rules sheet." There were no unfair advantages. Too often we forget that in the church. There are others who may follow God with different technicalities, but are still following the same Jesus.

This is not to say that everything goes. There are several clear commands in the New Testament about the nature of God and how to be holy before Him. But too many times we hold people to too high on technicalities. We forget to show patience to the new Christian who is still trying to learn. We forget to show grace to others whose faith doesn't look exactly like ours.

I am thankful for those guys who showed me some more technicalities to the rules. I am glad they showed me kindness and grace in applying those new and better techniques. I became a better player by many of those things. There were still other areas where I was not going to change the way I played. If I did, I would not have enjoyed playing nearly as much. And no matter what, I was still playing the same game.

--Alex Swango