

Tom Lehman and The Sports Writer

“I call myself a Christian, and look what I said to this guy. I don’t care what he wrote about me... nobody deserves that. What was I thinking? I’ve got to make this right.”— Tom Lehman

“Is anyone here perfect?” That’s the question Tom Lehman posed to a large group of us at a Men’s Golf Fellowship cookout event in Naples where he spoke recently. “I know I’m not perfect...that’s the reason I’m a Christian, because I am so imperfect.”

Tom was recounting an unfortunate...turned fortunate...set of incidents he had with the Scottish *Golf Digest* sports writer, John Huggan. The trouble started in 1999 after Huggan wrote a scathing article about the American players’ behavior at the 33rd Ryder Cup at Brookline, in which he unfairly and untruthfully singled out Tom. Tom did not react well. He determined then and there to tell Huggan exactly what he thought of him when he saw him at the Dunhill Cup in St. Andrews a couple weeks later. Seeing him near the driving range, Tom made a bee-line to Huggan and gave it to him with both barrels...language and all. It wasn’t pretty, and most certainly not Christ-like, but it was justified, so he rationalized. Tom went on to play the tournament and never gave the incident a second thought for seven years.

Then, in 2006, Tom became the 36th USA Ryder Cup Captain at the K Club in Dublin, Ireland. There he was reminded of his 1999 “in-his-face” incident. In that year Huggan wrote a second scathing article about him. In that article, Huggan described verbatim this 1999 driving range confrontation with Tom, language and all—for the whole golfing world to see. So how did Tom react this time? Not as you might expect. This time he was convicted by the truth in the article. He determined to make it right with Huggan. Instead of scheming a way to get back at him again, he reached out to him by email and acknowledged that everything Huggan said was accurate—including his hypocrisy as a Christian. He asked for Huggan’s forgiveness. Huggan was very quick to forgive him. To this day they are buddies, not enemies.

So what happened to Tom between 1999 and 2006? Why was his behavior so different when reacting to the second article? Was it because the second was accurate and the first was unjustifiably accusatory? Was it because Tom had grown in his maturity as a Christian over that seven year period? Maybe it was a combination, but there is an incredibly powerful lesson here either way.

There are two people in each of us who have given our lives to Christ—the Old Man (still bound by this world) and the New Man (set free in Christ). These two react in different ways when we’re unjustifiably attacked, accused and wronged. The Old Man gets angry and defends our pride at all cost. The New Man seeks forgiveness, peace and (if possible) reconciliation with our accusers, regardless of who’s right. The Old Man comes more “naturally” for most of us and is often first “at bat,” so to speak. Sometimes the New Man shows up right away, and saves us a lot of relationship trouble. Sometimes He convicts us later on and makes things right. Other times, we’re so obtuse we never get it and the Old Man gets the victory. In Tom’s case, it took seven years with Huggan, but the New Man finally won that battle. I can only imagine how great it is now between those two guys.

How is it with you? When wronged (and that comes in many forms), how do you react? What’s the delay-time between Old Man reaction and New Man victory? When will you get to a point in your life when the New man in Christ is right there in every case? That’s the ultimate goal and final prize—of our New Man Journey.— *Steve Silver*

Click on the link to watch Tom’s 5 minute story

<https://vimeo.com/322932251>