

Good Morning everyone, I'm KJ Choi.

First of all, I can't tell you how honored I am to be standing in front of you today as the tournament champion and to be able to speak to you about the Lord and my life on the PGA Tour. I would like to thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to play on the PGA Tour and for awarding me with good results.

It has already been a year since I won the Compaq Classic of New Orleans, but as the first Korean on the PGA Tour and as the first Korean to win on the PGA Tour, I can still feel my heart deeply moved by the memories I have from that win a year ago. Today, I would like to share with you how I have experienced the Lord's kindness and unconditional love.

I would like to believe that each and everyone of you here have a precious dream in your heart.

I started playing golf rather late in my career, when I was 16, but I can honestly say that I gave my best with all I had, to realize my dream of becoming a PGA Tour member. But even to this day, I believe that being a PGA Tour member isn't about how good of a player you are.

In order to become a PGA Tour member, there are 3 stages of tough qualifying school that players must go through. But due to the fact that the best players from all around the world come and try to qualify for a spot on the PGA Tour, getting through the First, Second, and Final Stages of the Q-School was really difficult.

Especially as a Korean, it was harder for me because of the differences in the grass conditions, weather, and culture between Korea and US. What I want to stress to you today is that my transition from the Asian Tour to the US PGA Tour was thoroughly written and laid out plan by the Lord, as a playwright would write a script..

I did not even know about the Lord before I met my wife. I did go to church though, but as a formality, without any purpose. But my life changed when in April of 1999, I was baptized. Exactly 2 weeks after that, I won my first international tournament, the Kirin Open, in Japan as a tour professional.

Up until my win at Kirin Open, I had competed in tournaments strictly believing in my own skills and talent, but Kirin Open was different, as it was the first tournament that I played where I had entrusted all my faith and beliefs to the Lord. I remember being in the hotel room the night I won, with \$120,000 in cash underneath my bed. I remember being so happy that I couldn't keep my mouth closed. Trust me, I know what it means to be so happy that you can't even close your mouth!!!!

By winning the Kirin Open, I received an exemption to the Final Stage of the PGA Tour Qualifying School. This meant that I did not have to go through the First and Second Stages of the grueling Q-School. I only had to pass the Final Stage to earn my PGA Tour card. This was the first plan that the Lord had written down for me in his script book.

The Final Stage of Q School is a 6 round tournament where only the top 35 finishers are lucky enough to earn their PGA Tour cards. After the first 2 rounds, my score was 7-under and I was in sole third place after 2 rounds... I remember saying to myself "This is going to be easy" and I was confident that I could do it. But as days went by one by one, by the end of the fifth round, I dropped down to 48th place... I felt hopeless and I didn't know what to do. I was getting nervous and I knew there was nothing that anyone could do for me... it wasn't like someone else could have played the final round for me. I knew that the Lord would help me, but as a human, I couldn't help feeling concerned about my position.

But interestingly enough, that night of the fifth round, was a Sunday. I had found a Korean church within 40 minutes by driving from where my hotel was and I was able to attend the evening worship. During the worship, I felt the assurance from the Lord that he would help me earn my PGA Tour card. I came back to the hotel and prayed to the Lord together with my wife and we were able to feel the peace and comfort of the Lord.

I still remember the gospel that I was singing with my wife and son David, who was 2 years old at that time, which goes something like... *“What concerns do I have when the Lord is within me...”*

The 6th round had finally come... The 6th round is where a lot of the players do not perform as well, due to the pressure and nervousness they feel...However, I was able to play the sixth round in peace and was able to score an impressive 3 under for the day, 8 under total.

However, a total score of 8 under for the tournament was in no way a guarantee that I would earn a PGA Tour card. Of the last two groups still remaining to finish, 2 players were also at 8 under. If any one of those two players birdied, I would have had to pack my bags and fly back home to Korea...

But at last, based on plan #2 of the Lord's blueprint, I passed the Final Stage, finishing in 35th place, to earn the final spot for the following year's PGA Tour...I had finally become a PGA Tour member!!!

I thought everything would go well once I became a PGA Tour member... but there were a lot of hurdles waiting ahead of me... courses that I had never been to before, different culture, and especially the difficulty of learning English which to this day even after 4 years, I still am not able to speak it directly to you.. My first year on the PGA Tour was a very difficult time in my life...

I thought about giving up and going back to Korea where everything was guaranteed... but each time I felt like quitting, I thought about the Lord and his unconditional help that he has given me.. I prayed with my family and gained the strength that I needed to get me going.

There's something that I want to stress to you today. If you want to realize your dream but encounter difficulties that may seem impossible to overcome, please don't forget that if you pray to the Lord and give it your best effort, you will achieve your goals.

Unfortunately, at the end of my first year on the PGA Tour, I was not able to finish within the Top 125 Money Ranking which I had to in order to be an exempt member the following year. This meant that I had to go back to the Final Stage of the dreaded Q-

School. Going back to the Q-School wasn't as difficult as the previous year, but knowing that I might not have the chance to play on the Tour that I dreamed about all my life, the pressure I felt was twice as much as the year before. Coincidentally, after 5 rounds, I was once again faced with adversity...I was in 52nd position and I once again felt hopeless... Then I sang to the Lord again.. Can you guess what it was?? That's right... it was the same song I sang the year before on the night before the 6th round which went something like... "*What concerns do I have when the Lord is with me..*"

Just as explained in the passages of Deuteronomy, with the thought that the Lord has gone ahead of me in my journey and prepared everything for me in advance, I felt the confidence that I could be strong and courageous with the power given to me by the Lord.

I still remember clearly how I felt in the nerve wrecking final round... it wasn't visible, but I felt like something more powerful and peaceful was in my presence next to me while I played the final round.

Again this time, I passed the final stage as the 35th player to earn the final spot... and the following year, I finally realized my childhood dream of becoming a PGA Tour champion, right here in New Orleans. Hallelujah!

In my interviews with the media, I always thank the Lord first and pass on the honor to him... this is true... there are no words to express the unconditional love that the Lord has given to me. The day before my win, my wife wanted to share the following passage from the Bible with me:

I would like to read passages from Luke 19, verse 29 through 34:

²⁹As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰"Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' "

³²Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

³⁴They replied, "The Lord needs it."

My wife and I prayed before the final round by reading this passage:

If the Lord needs it, then untie the colt...I prayed, "if the Lord needs me, then help me pass the Final Stage..."

I am sure that each and every one of you have your own God-given talent. If you learn to use that talent for the Lord and not for your own, then the Lord will undoubtedly be happy and I guarantee that your dreams will be fulfilled.

The gift that the Lord has given me is the talent to play golf. I want to live a life honoring the Lord's name by working hard to be a top golfer. And I want to fulfill the Lord's reason for sending me to the US PGA Tour.

By working hard at golf, I want to spread the Lord's words to those who do not know the Lord and I want to provide love and help to those who are unfortunate enough to have them.

Even now, although I don't play well in all the tournaments, I try hard to find the Lord's message behind my poor performances. That is why I am able to find peace in myself even during hard and difficult times.

It has become a habit for me to read a passage from the Bible and to pray before I go to bed every night. I am sure you know how beneficial a good habit can be...right??

Whatever you do, if you prepare yourself with a prayer beforehand, and at least devote 5 minutes of your time to the Lord, I firmly believe that you will be able to climb to be one of the top leaders of this great nation.

I hope that what I have told you today will help you in some way, and I too, will give my best to live a victorious life praising the Lord every day.

Thank you very much.