

When I read a profile of one particular person in the *Wall Street Journal* recently, I knew that I had to include that person in the Whitestone-podcast “About” series that profiles notable people, yeah, those folks who can shed light on the fruitfulness of our journeys serving Jesus. But, let me tell ya, it’s pretty likely he would be surprised to find that I am profiling him on this very episode.

Now, to be clear, as a person who doesn’t golf, I had never heard of this guy before he was profiled not long ago in the *Wall Street Journal*—his profile was published just before the world-famous Masters golf tournament. As you likely know, the Masters is considered one of the most prestigious golf tournaments worldwide. Now this golfer who was profiled in direct context to the upcoming Masters tournament was Stewart Hagestad. And Hagestad was one of only 89 golfers participating in the 2024 Masters tournament.

Who, you might be saying? Just who is Stewart Hagestad? Did I miss knowing about one of the hot new young golfers coming onto the world golfing scene? Well, you’d be justified in asking that. But Stewart Hagestad is *not* a young pro golfer new on the scene! At the time of the newspaper profile, Hagestad’s full-time job was as a 33-year-old finance professional working at a Wall Street investment and advisory firm managing over \$60 billion in assets. And Hagestad is officially just an *amateur* golfer.

But here’s the thing. Whether he was an amateur or a pro, Hagestad was participating as one of the elite 89 golfers in the entire world participating in the Masters tournament! And Hagestad doesn’t train or practice or play in lots of tournaments as a full-time, pro golfer. But there he was in 2024 at Augusta National golf course, competing alongside the best pro golfers in the world. So...how did he get *there*? By winning the elite U.S. Mid-Amateur golf tournament for 25-and-older folks in 2023—and that’s the third time he’s done that. Because of Hagestad’s accomplishments, he has appeared in six of the so-called “major” golf tournaments like the Masters and been selected to compete for golf’s Walker Cup four times.

Listen, here’s an amazing difference between golf and the other leading sports. In the golf scene, amateurs are welcomed into top tournaments—and even lauded for being there! In contrast, an amateur football player can’t compete in the NFL, the National Football League. And an amateur baseball player can’t compete in Major League Baseball. But just because the most elite golf tournaments are open to amateurs doesn’t mean that very many amateurs ever get there. And even fewer are holding full-time, high-end jobs at the top level of finance, the type of job that chews up the core of the many hours and intense focus each week. But wait—here’s what the *Wall Street Journal* reported about that:

“Those close to Hagestad say his [golf] game hasn’t improved [over the years] *despite* working a day job. It’s improved *because* of it. [Hagestad] has an uncanny capacity to be intentional about everything he does—whether that’s personally, professionally or his obsessive pursuit to hone his golf game during his off-hours. ...

“‘I think him doing this while he’s working is part of [Hagestad’s] superpower,’ says his friend AJ Ferraro, who’s caddying for him this week [at the Masters]. ‘There’s something beneficial about having a fulfilling workday and being excited about hitting the golf balls when you get out of the office at night—he’s forced to be more focused in both arenas.’ ...

“‘He’s found a way to get the most out of every second he spends practicing,’ Ferraro says. ‘An hour or two a day for Stew might be a few days or a week’s worth of practice for the next person.’”

So, what happens when a true part-timer like Stewart Hagestad shows up at the Masters tournament? Well, in 2016, he won the prequalifying Mid-Am tournament for the first time, he went on to the Masters, and he took home the Silver Cup for the best amateur score. Alas, in his participation in the 2024 Masters, Hagestad didn’t make the cut after the first couple of rounds.

...But there’s a key long-term point for serious Christians that Stewart Hagestad has clearly modeled by his vivid example. And that key point is missed by large numbers of Christians. To understand that, we start by revisiting a defining Whitestone topic of Christians being in what’s often called *full-time ministry*.

You see, in many Christian circles in America, the phrase “full-time ministry” has often been used to mean that a person’s paycheck comes from a church or “official” Christian nonprofit. We’ve talked about that before. Sadly, that implies—and is often intended to imply!—there are vast swaths of time in secular workplaces where believing nurses, accountants and cashiers are inherently *not* in ministry to others!

But the reality is that every Christian believer is called to be in full-time ministry—yeah, that’s right, intentionally “work[ing] heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Colossians 3:23 ESV). Yes indeed, that’s being excellent in intentional stewardship of our gifting in conjunction with our continually serving others.

In fact, that’s clearly a measure of God’s full model of ministry: that believers intermingle with unbelievers effectively in order to touch their lives. Yep, they “go forth,” partnering in God’s purposes in proclaiming the gospel to all. Frankly, few pastors go to large downtown office buildings or construction sites to minister the good news to every creature. Fact is, such shepherd-pastors (Ephesians 4:11) are to be rightly and broadly equipping the saints to do just that on behalf of Christ in each of their respective workplaces!

And such equipping is uniformly straightforward and quite intentional: to serve others well...to love others well...to steward the resources of others well...and to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15)

And this is right where the elite golfer Stewart Hagestad’s example comes in! Remember that *Wall Street Journal* report about Hagestad’s handling of his day job in finance as well as his golf life? Well, I’m going to quote the very same paragraphs again...but substitute a Christian believer named Smith for Hagestad and substitute his Christian love and witness for Hagestad’s golf! So, here we go with the revised quote...

“Those close to **Smith** say his **love for others and witness** hasn’t improved [over the years] *despite* working a day job. It’s improved *because* of it. Smith has an uncanny capacity to be intentional about everything he does—whether that’s personally, professionally or his obsessive pursuit to hone his **love for others and witness** during his off-hours.

“I think **Smith** doing this **love of others and witness** while he’s working is part of his superpower,’ say his friends. ‘There’s something beneficial about having a fulfilling workday and being excited about **love for others and witness** when you get out of the office at night—he’s forced to be more focused in both arenas.’” Well now...how about that!

Wow, in his mimicking of the measure of intentionality and focus of the golfer Stewart Hagestad, can we say that the Christian Smith is just an amateur who wrongly stepped out of bounds and should leave the highest level of the Christian loving of others to “professional” Christians who are in “full-time ministry”...? *May it never be!* To paraphrase a famous author: “never forget that the ministering of God’s purposes is too important to be left entirely in the hands of the professionals!” Yes, as a serious believer at his particular workplace *and beyond* each day, Smith is *continuously* in his Spirit-directed, full-time ministry!

And we simply must take all this a step further. Somehow, many a Christian in the modern era has gained traction with very loud digital megaphones by practicing “a ministry of condemnation” of others. And that’s quite the opposite in both message and effect of a New Covenant ministry of reconciliation based on God’s love manifested by Christ on the Cross. The Apostle Paul very ably regards the ministry of condemnation as the “ministry of death.” (2 Corinthians 3) So, instead, how about a consistent, intentional ministry of reconciliation to both unbelievers in the workplace and also believers in our churches?

Look, this is really very intriguing. Stewart Hagestad—a finance professional and elite amateur golfer—is in a zone of consistent intentionality and focus to thrive at very high levels in both spheres. And in the same fashion, motivated believers can practice consistent intentionality and focus regarding Jesus’s command to love God and love neighbors! And what amazing liberty and joy that God has granted us when we seamlessly, redemptively love all those we touch...yes, continuously living out our appointed full-time ministry of love and reconciliation! Now *that’s* what being a new creature in Christ is all about!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Stewart Hagestad is clearly striving to represent intentional excellence, both at an elite business firm and in the golfing world. Do you perceive that American Christianity is broadly focused on intentional “full-time” impact by believers on behalf of Christ? Discuss.
2. Do you think “amateur” believers can effectively represent Christ and him crucified as well as a “professional” Christian theologian or pastor? Discuss.
3. Do you intentionally, continuously, joyously carry Christ’s love for others in your full-time ministry? Give examples.