

Golf champion aims to shine for Jesus



Webb Simpson celebrates winning The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass on May 13. (PHOTO: USA Today)

By Grant Winter

The next biggest golf tournament in the world after the four Majors is The Players Championship in the United States and Webb Simpson was quick to get his priorities right after winning it on Mother's day Sunday.

First up, I'm a child of God and He has given me a gift to play golf so it's all thanks to him or this, said the American who picked up a cheque for \$1.97-million which equates to about a hefty R24-million.

There's big money and celebrity status for those who succeed in professional golf but Simpson, who has always spoken openly about his Christian faith, remains humble and grounded.

The 32-year-old won the tournament with an 18-under-par total of 270, with South African Charl Schwartzel sharing second

place on 274. But for Simpson, who did win a Major in 2012 when he captured the US Open, this was first victory in almost five years.

So I've had my struggles and at one stage I felt like my game was at the bottom of the barrel and there have been many tears shed over dinner with my wife, Taylor Dowd. But she has stood by me all along, and so have a lot of others who have never stopped praying for me.

Golf is actually a team sport for me. I have all this support so I'm just the one hitting the shots out there, adds the father of four, who dedicated the win on Mother's Day to his mum Debbie and to the memory of his father Sam who passed away last year, and had introduced him to golf and always told him to never give up.

Tribute to SA golfer

Part of the Simpson team is his caddie Paul Tesori who shares his strong Christian faith and not only did Webb thank the bagman for all the encouragement he has given him, but he also paid tribute to fellow golfer, South Africa's Tim Clark.

An encounter with Clark exactly a year ago, on the eve of the 2017 Players Championship, helped turn Simpson's golf around. Clark, the 2010 Players winner, talked Simpson into using the so-called claw grip with his putting. It was on the putting green last year and Tim asked me how I've been putting, Simpson recalled. I told him, pretty inconsistent. He asked me had I ever tried the claw grip, and I said no. So I tried it. I liked it. So, thanks to Tim I started putting much better last year. Now he's one of the top putter's on tour.

But with Simpson it will always be God first, and not golf. In an interview with The Gospel Coalition, when his game wasn't at its best, he had this to say: "I don't see my gifting as unique. My gift happens to be golf, but another guy's might be preaching and another's teaching. The Lord spreads us out for

his purposes and for our enjoyment of him.

Great Commission

My calling isn't to be a golfer. Like every other Christian, I'm called to participate in the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. And for me that commission is meeting and having fellowship with the guys on tour and the people I come across."

And Simpson knows his security is not being good at golf, but being looked after by his Father God: "Any time I hear a bird chirping, I think of Matthew 6, when Jesus talks about how the birds neither toil nor store up for themselves, but God takes care of them. And how much more valuable are we than the birds? It's a little reminder to me that God is good and taking care of me, no matter what it looks like. He's always working for my good, no matter where I am."

And he doesn't see himself, being a top golfer, as a role model for younger golfers: When young people look up to me, it often sounds something like, I would love to be that good at golf or win that tournament. It's hard because I know their desire to win a tournament is not bad, but I don't want anyone to envy me for what I've done in golf. I want them to see the light that is inside me. That's my hope when I'm around young people. I'd rather they be more impressed with Jesus than with me, the golfer.