



I've never been a good golfer but I always used to enjoy playing. I could hit a few good shots, but at the same time I was no stranger to the rough. The rough is the part of the course just off the fairway and, as the name implies, the ground here is rougher and the grass longer than on the fairway. So if you're in the rough, you're in trouble!

Playing back home in Wales I was used to the rough, and it was all part of the fun of the game. But one day playing in California I saw a sign in the rough which read 'BEWARE OF RATTLESNAKES'! This rough was no fun, it was dangerous. If ever there was an incentive to hit the ball straight and keep on the fairway, this was it. The incentive was great, but unfortunately it wasn't matched by my skill at golf and a few balls did fly off into the rough. I made no attempt to retrieve them, but left them to the rattlesnakes.

The Christian life is like a golf course. There

are fairways, bunkers, and the dreaded rough. Our task as believers is to keep on the fairway because the rough has more deadly enemies than rattlesnakes for us. The devil, that old serpent, waits to ensnare the child of God.

**'A righteous man may have many troubles' (Psalm 34:19).**

When we become Christians we come into a living and personal relationship with God. We're now children of God and members of the household of faith. The implications of this for our lives are many and varied. But it doesn't mean that we never have any more problems or difficulties. Far from it. The experiences of God's people in Scripture show this. David spoke for us all when he wrote, 'A righteous man may have many troubles' (Psalm 34:19).

There are several reasons for this. No Christian is sinless, and often the repercussions of our sins cause us problems. Sometimes God has to teach us lessons that we will learn only in affliction, and therefore he allows trials to come into our lives. Then, of course, the devil is always seeking to make life difficult for God's people. So problems will come in all shapes and sizes. The important question is, 'How do we cope with them?'

Psalm 34 was written by David as a reaction to a major problem. He must have been at an all-time spiritual low at this point, but even in such a poor spiritual condition he turns to God in this remarkable Psalm. So often when pressures pile up on us, or when our weaknesses overcome us and we feel hopeless failures, guilt makes us reluctant to pray. We convince ourselves that we must do something to put things right before we can pray; but by doing this we deprive ourselves of the blessings of prayer by instead listening to the lies of Satan.

In our sin and in our failures, whatever the cause, there is only one place for the believer: 'This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles' (verse 6).

What makes a man poor? The first thing that would spring to mind is lack of money, and this would certainly have been true of David at this time. He was an outlaw, having to beg for bread. It's true that his prospects were tremendous—he was chosen by God and the throne was to be his—but at that moment he was poor. But surely that's not what he meant in verse 6. He was a man after God's own heart, chosen, anointed, and with glorious prospects, but in his troubles he did not behave as if these things were so. He was afraid of man, and stooped to lies and deceit. There was no trust in God, and looking back David realizes how wrong he was.

**'For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith' (Romans 1:17).**

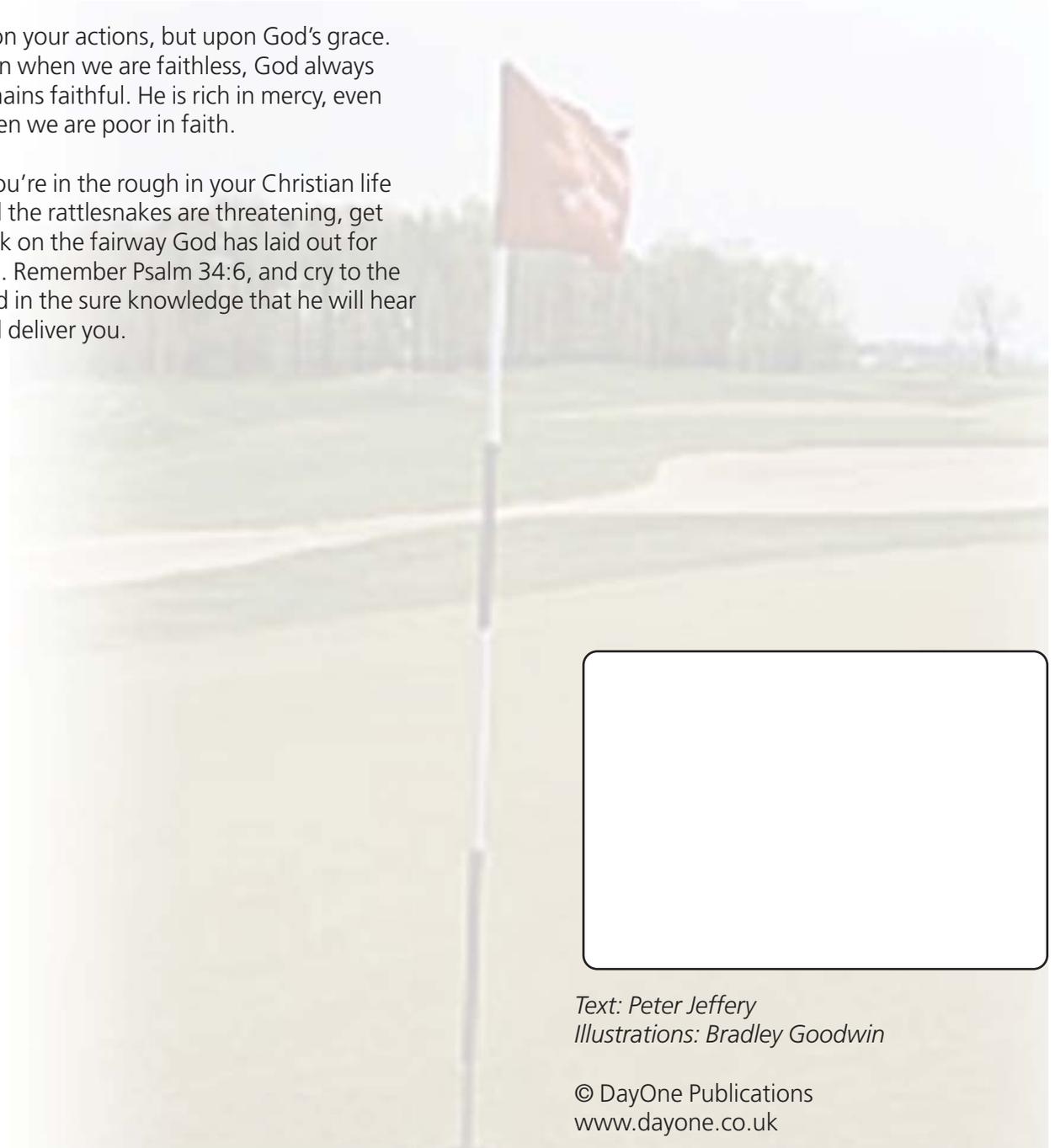
Do you feel like this? You're a Christian, and therefore you have glorious prospects. You love God, yet you don't always act as if this is so. You feel

ashamed, a failure and a poor Christian. That may all be true; it certainly was of David. But David knew that even though he was poor in his own estimation, he was righteous in God's. The same is true of all Christians. Our acceptance by God never depended upon our good deeds, therefore our bad deeds as Christians cannot make us lose that acceptance. Righteousness is a gift of God. It is a grace that comes to us through the gospel: 'For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith' (Romans 1:17). We are acceptable to God because of Christ's righteousness, not our own. This doesn't mean that we can treat sin lightly. Paul argues this out powerfully in Romans 6, and David in Psalm 34 had clearly felt his spiritual poverty caused by his own sin. He was broken-hearted and crushed in spirit (verse 18), but the Lord is close to such people. They're still God's people, therefore they can cry to the Lord for mercy and forgiveness.

When you feel so poor that you begin to think you have no right even to pray, remember that your right does not depend

upon your actions, but upon God's grace. Even when we are faithless, God always remains faithful. He is rich in mercy, even when we are poor in faith.

If you're in the rough in your Christian life and the rattlesnakes are threatening, get back on the fairway God has laid out for you. Remember Psalm 34:6, and cry to the Lord in the sure knowledge that he will hear and deliver you.



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