



# LINKS PLAYERS INTERNATIONAL

## *Starting a Links Fellowship*

Throughout the United States, men and women with golf in common are discovering that there are things much more valuable to be shared in life than stories of birdies and bogeys. At the same time, they are comfortable among their golfing friends, and enjoy spending time with these people.

In Links Fellowships, golf meets life. Men and women open the Bible together, studying the essential matters of Scripture. They pray for one another, rejoicing in God's amazing answers. They challenge one another to live more completely for Christ. And they reach out to those outside their Fellowship, offering the Good News of Jesus and the ministry of reconciliation between us and God.

Through the years, many people have asked us how they can start a Fellowship at their course or club. It is not so difficult, as long as:

- Your heart is ready
- You know the gifts God has given you
- You have a partner or team
- You are equipped

The purpose of this short manual called is to lead you through each of these four areas, assessing the preparation God has taken you through in order to establish a Links Fellowship where you are.

In addition, we will introduce you to printed, online, and human resources that will allow you to access even more material to help you get started. We hope every part is of great value to you.

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### CONTENTS

Readiness of heart	2	Links Player's Mission	10
The gifts of God in you	3	Links Players resources	11
Teamwork	5	Links Players staff	13
What it all looks like	7	The global connection	15

## READINESS OF HEART

To the Philippians, the apostle Paul wrote that God causes us “to will and to do according to His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Amazing, isn’t it—that before God enables us to do something in a practical sense, He plants in us the desire to do it? This probably fits every thought you have ever had about motivation. It’s so much easier to do a job you love!

So, we would have to say that a principal asset for beginning a Links Fellowship is an eagerness to see it happen at your course or club. That is, you are eager to:

- **Meet** regularly with others of like mind
- **Study the Bible** with those who are strong in their faith, those who just beginning to ask questions, and everyone in-between
- **Pray** for each other’s needs, as well as for those who do not attend the Fellowship, and to **minister** to these needs in every way possible
- **Strike up conversations** that lead those who are unaware of the Fellowship and the Good News of Christ, inviting them to participate in the activities of the Fellowship

If this is where your heart is, then you will be willing to do whatever God would have you do to make this desire a reality. This includes prayerful conversation with Him about the nature of the Fellowship, the doors you will need to see opened in order for this to happen, and those who might join you as leaders and participants. In addition, you will need to be certain that your heart is ready for the obedience to God’s Word and continued learning that God would require of you (consult the qualities of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1-7), so that you are respected for your faith among both fellow believers and outsiders (1 Peter 2:12).

## THE GIFTS OF GOD IN YOU

If you have ever had the opportunity to be discipled by an experienced follower of Christ, your training has likely included a look at the body of Christ and spiritual gifts as they are outlined by the apostle Paul in Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, and Ephesians 4:11-16. If not, it would be of immense value to you to stop here and read those passages. Much of what we will say next hangs on your knowledge of them.

With Paul's passages on the body of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we find three essential thrusts:

- Jesus Christ is the head over all
- To each one in His body, gifts are given for ministry to all the others in the body
- All parts of the body with their individual gifts are necessary to the body if it is to function as God intended it to function

Let's look at the importance of these three thrusts one-by-one.

*Jesus is head over all.* There is much sentiment in our time toward religion and spirituality. But the sentiment changes when that spiritual focus is applied with exclusivity—that is, when one way is held up as the only way to God in heaven. Both the statement of faith and the mission of Links Fellowships, however, call for such singular pre-eminence to be given to the God who is three-in-one: Heavenly Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are not establishing a set of priorities when we say that Jesus is the head over all; we are following the plain teaching of Scripture. We encourage Links Fellowships to talk about Jesus in the midst of every other conversation they have. He is to be integrated into our lives, so He should be integrated into all of our discussions of life and how it is to be lived in “the real world” (including the activities of a Links Fellowship).

*To each one, gifts are given for ministry.* An unfortunate development in the historical life of the church is that we have in many cases turned over the lion's share of the work to a few "professionals." We figure that if the clergy are doing their job, the rest of us lay folk are covered, too. Paul's words about spiritual gifts indicate a vastly different perspective: in the healthy church of Christ, all members of the body have a function. They may be mercy-givers or administrators or generosity-bestowers or teachers or faith-giants or wisdom-imparters or pastors or servers or exhorters or prophets or evangelists. In fact, even listing these like this runs the risk of allowing us to think that one gifted person beats out another because of their gift. But this is not true. Your gifts matter as much as anyone else's. Why? Because the gifts are all given by the Holy Spirit so that we might serve and edify one another. And people are best ministered to in small groups and one-on-one. Often we hear people say they are not good as teachers, for they are thinking that they must be like the person delivering the message at a mega-church on Sunday morning; all the while, they may superbly successfully get through to individual people "in the walk of life," giving them wisdom and instruction that makes a difference like no "super teacher" can!

So ask yourself, "What is my gift? What has God equipped me to do?" And if you're not sure, or you need confirmation, ask someone who is close to you. They can help you see what you cannot.

*All the parts of the body are necessary.* This is a powerful truth for us all, but especially for (a) those who think they have the ability to go it alone, and (b) those who know they cannot! In the body of Christ, God puts us in a place where the work must be shared. In fact, if you can do the work on your own, the work you are doing is probably not big enough. In your Links Fellowship, you will work alongside those with whom you make a natural connection, but also alongside those whose ways are quite different. Trust us, in Christ, you can come to love them both!

A past chairman of our Links Players board used to say that the definition of a Links Fellowship is “two guys praying for their golfing buddies.” Actually, Links Fellowships are quite a bit more than that, but that’s a pretty good place to start.

When someone calls or emails to ask about the possibility of starting a Fellowship at their course, one of the first questions we ask is whether this prospective leader has others alongside for the development of the group. This is not because we doubt the leadership qualities of the person (we may not even know them). Rather, we ask because we know that even if a Fellowship has a chance at starting off well in the hands of one person, it is unlikely to grow without others being meaningfully involved, and it is almost certain to die if that one person must step away from the Fellowship.

Here are three important reasons that you are going to want to a team in place before you start your Fellowship:

- The **organizational work**, including the arrangements for special events, can be shared. The Masters is hosted each year by the membership at Augusta National, a membership that is actually well-balanced in its make-up for the very purpose of hosting. Your Fellowship may not be hosting the Masters, but you will engage in hospitality of formal and informal kinds. You want to share the work that comes with that.
- The **ministerial work**, including the teaching of material and the facilitation of discussion. Sometimes it is good to have different leaders simply because “fresh voices” allow us to hear God’s instruction for us more readily. But there are special times of ministry as well, like when a hospital visit is in order and one leader is out-of-town. A group of leaders—which itself grows in number as the

participants in the Fellowship grow spiritually—becomes increasingly capable of serving one another’s needs.

- The **emotional weight**. Any endeavor that engages God, engages people, and engages the enemy of God will meet up with emotional highs and lows. There will be celebrations, as when people gives their hearts to Christ for the first time or are baptized. But there will also be times for commiseration, when it will be excellent to have brothers and sisters in Christ at your side for prayer to the Almighty God.

When it comes time to “sign up” as a Links Fellowship that is recognized and publicized online through our website—giving visitors a chance to get to know your Fellowship and potential Fellowship leaders a chance to glean from your experiences—we will ask that you submit the signatures of at least three people who agree together to uphold the five components of the Links Player’s Mission. This agreement shows as well that you understand the value of teamwork under Christ’s headship.

## WHAT IT ALL LOOKS LIKE

OK, let's get to the nuts and bolts. If you start a Links Fellowship, what will it look like? First, let's say that there is no "standard." Ideally, Fellowships are good fits for the courses or clubs where they reside, so they will look different according to some of the characteristics of their local meeting place and leadership team. But here we will help you see what is possible.

### **Where should we meet?**

The advantage of meeting at a course or club is that your gatherings will become evident to others, both those who would be initially inclined to join you and those who would not. In fact, people who would never make their first contact with the Bible or the God of the Bible in a church will sometimes dare to make such contact in a familiar place like their course or club. So we would encourage the golf course as your place of meeting, if at all possible. We know of Fellowships that meet in the dining rooms, smaller meeting rooms, and locker rooms, usually during the club's slow hours, often early in the morning.

If you cannot meet at the course or club, we suggest meeting at a home near the course, especially if the home is seen as part of a recognized golf course community. Again, this offers more tentative guests a place of familiarity to investigate the claims of Scripture.

Failing either of these options, you may find that a local restaurant offers a good option for meeting. And yes, we have had some Fellowships meet in churches themselves, but this makes the outreach aspect of their meeting less likely, so these Fellowships have kept their eyes open for other spots.

### **How often should we meet?**

Most Fellowships meet weekly. Using Links Players Bible studies and other series requires this sort of regular meeting, as does

a constant commitment to supporting one another in prayer and practical ministry. However, some Fellowships are organized around meals and golf outings more than regular Bible study, and these Fellowships may meet monthly during the golf season (which varies with the region). Finally, there is at least one existing Fellowship that meets only once per year, for an annual trip, but whose members intentionally stay in touch throughout the year, with specific intent to support one another in prayer.

### **What time of day should we meet?**

Again, this will vary. Many Fellowships gather first thing in the morning, which seems to be typical of groups that are all men. Others meet over lunch. Still other groups get together at the end of the day. As a special note, where we have presence in retirement communities, we find that a 5 o'clock gathering is popular, after which many will go to dinner together.

### **Should we be playing golf together?**

This may come as a surprise, but not all Fellowships make a regular habit of playing golf together. Usually, though, if the Fellowship meets at a golf course, at least some of the participants will stick around for a game of golf. Many Fellowships, however, include golf every time they meet, though these groups often come together just once a month. And some Fellowships sponsor annual golf events, either as trips or as tournaments. These special events are especially good for introducing more people to your Fellowship.

### **Does our Fellowship have to be 'open'?**

Because of the rules in place at private clubs, some Fellowships cannot open their doors, except by invitation of a member. This is not always the case, however, particularly if the Fellowship meets in the early morning when few members are around. In these cases, there is often an understanding among club staff that some guests will be attending, but members are always present as their "sponsors." Other than this kind of restriction, all Fellowships should seek to be welcoming to those who want to find out what the group is about.

**Special question: What if our club won't have us?**

When missionaries look to establish a presence in a country, they will sometimes find that the laws of the land shut them out if they go in as “missionaries.” But if they come in as business people or educators, they are welcome to contribute to the life of the nation—and while they are there they keep eyes and ears open for opportunities to share personally with others about Christ. Similar circumstances exist at some clubs. When a Fellowship’s leaders look to set up a regular gathering time and place for the Fellowship within the club, they meet opposition from the club, either at the managerial or the board level.

The line of reasoning often presented in apprehensive clubs is this: “If we allow a Christian group, then we will have to allow a Jewish group or Muslim group.” This may be true. However, it is also true that they will likely not be asked to make room for such a group, as non-church gatherings like this are not common in other faiths. Still, you want to respond carefully and respectfully, so that the doors may swing open at a later time. You may find it possible, though, to state an understanding of the “if we allow...” argument and ask to get started all the same, with a willingness to revisit the decision with the board if they are indeed later asked to make way for other religious groups.

If you find that the answer is still *no*, find another place to meet and establish yourselves as a meaningful group. Faithfully pray together that you might gain access to the club in the future. We have rejoiced with Fellowships that have done just this, made a respectful name for themselves, and found the club’s door open to them a few months or years down the line (sometimes once the club leadership changes).

## THE LINKS PLAYER'S MISSION

Many years ago, the founder of Links Players, Jim Hiskey, developed an acronym using the letters in L-I-N-K-S. It has since become the mission for each individual Links Player, and thus for all those in Links Fellowships. It is this mission that we ask each Links Fellowship leadership team to “sign off” on when they begin. It features five key aspects, beginning with the Great Commandment and ending with the Great Commission. Here it is:

### **L** LOVE GOD AND OTHERS

*Jesus replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39)*

### **I** INTEGRATE CHRIST'S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE

*“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)*

### **N** NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)*

### **K** KINDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY

*“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:40)*

### **S** SHARE CHRIST THROUGH THE GREAT GAME OF GOLF

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though He were making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20a)*

## **LINKS PLAYERS RESOURCES**

Our primary goal in building new resources at Links Players is to provide provocative material that is useful by Links Fellowships and their leaders for both outreach and study. This does not mean that our materials cannot be used by individuals; they can. It just means that we keep up our conversations with Links Fellowships to determine the next best resource we can build.

Also, in providing these materials, we look to do everything at as little a cost as possible. The Good News of Christ was never meant to be sold, so we stay away from sales as much as we can. We provide nearly everything downloadable online at no cost, and when we do send “hard copies” to you, we ask only that our production and shipping/handling costs be reimbursed so we can continue to operate in this way.

### **ONLINE**

The most important thing you need to know about Links Players resources is that they are available online at our web site, [www.linksplayers.com](http://www.linksplayers.com). This site includes the archive for our popular Links Daily Devotional, Player Profiles from the pages of the Links Players magazine, our ever-increasing group of Bible studies, and video and audio resources. Materials available for order may be purchased right there on the site, via PayPal’s secure services.

### **LINKS PLAYERS MAGAZINE**

The Links Letter magazine is how Links Players got started, when a group of PGA Tour professionals looked for a means to publicly present their faith in a way that the normal media avenues did not permit. The magazine is published once each year (around February 1), and is distributed in bulk at the cost of shipping only. In fact, pre-orders (by December 31) in sets of 50 are sent without shipping costs. The magazine includes features of PGA, LPGA, and Champions Tour professionals, as

well as business and political leaders with a connection to the game. The magazine is funded through the generous donations of individual readers, who receive the magazine at the outset of each year as well. A simple request by email gets you on the mailing list ([linksletter@linksplayers.com](mailto:linksletter@linksplayers.com)).

### **LINKS DAILY DEVOTIONAL**

The Daily Devotional goes out by email every weekday morning to golfers who have found it enriching to their faith for many years. The Devotional's daily contents, as well as archives indexed both by Scripture and by topic, are available online. Additionally, each Friday, the devotional comes with a pdf Bible study, which is used as the regular weekly study by many Links Fellowships.

### **LINKS PLAYERS HANDBOOKS**

The Links Players Handbook is a study guide for Fellowships that are just getting started. Bound in a spiral, it is a five- or six-week study exploring the biblical foundations for the five aspects of the Links Player's Mission.

### **LINKS BIBLE STUDIES**

We are constantly adding to our collections of Bible studies for Links Fellowships. Our current series include an in-depth look at the five aspects of the Links Player's Mission (five 8-lesson studies) and the popular Spiritual Due Diligence series (eight studies, two of which have accompanying video introductions). We also build a study to accompany each year's Links Letter magazine. Each study is available as a free pdf download, or may be ordered from us.

### **THE RED DOOR COMMUNITY**

Each week throughout the desert season, Links Players president Jeffrey Cranford teaches in La Quinta, California, at a consortium of country club Bible studies called The Red Door Community. His teachings are captured as podcasts and made available through The Red Door Community link on our site.

## LINKS PLAYERS STAFF

After the power of Christ working in us, the best resource we have at Links Players is our staff. And we think that as you get to know them, you will agree. Presently, we have regional leaders throughout America's sunny golf zones. These regional directors are engaged in at least four different functions in their regions:

- Planting and leading local Fellowships near their own home
- Igniting and encouraging leaders in other locales in the region, through personal contact, as well as by email and telephone, helping them to plant and lead Fellowships at their own local courses
- Promoting crossover among the Fellowships through regional events and communication
- Leading the way in outreach events by arranging for the program where local Fellowships provide organization, promotion and facilitation of the event

These directors are golf savvy and experienced in ministry. They maintain an "insider status" among non-Christian golfers by playing regularly and staying aware of business and professional interests. We know that you will find these directors committed to the kingdom of Christ and eager to help you as you look to minister to golfers where you are.

Here is our current staff:



**JEFFREY CRANFORD**

National President and Regional Director for the Coachella Valley (Palm Springs area) of California

*Jeffrey teaches as several country club Bible studies each week, as he has done for the past 20 years. He is a PGA teaching professional, with significant experience in the competitive arena, includ-*

ing participation in the 2006 PGA Championship. You may reach Jeffrey initially by email at [jcranford@linksplayers.com](mailto:jcranford@linksplayers.com).

## **JOSH NELSON**

Southeast Region Director

*Josh's Southeast Region covers Florida, the Carolinas, and Alabama, but maintains a special emphasis on the greater Atlanta locale. Josh has been both a businessman and a professional golfer with Canadian Tour experience. You may reach Josh initially at [jnelson@linksplayers.com](mailto:jnelson@linksplayers.com).*



## **RANDY WOLFF**

South Central Region Director

*Randy's South Central Region covers Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Louisiana. Randy played the PGA Tour and worked in business and ministry before joining Links Players. He operates out of the Dallas locale. You may reach Randy initially at [rwolff@linksplayers.com](mailto:rwolff@linksplayers.com).*



## **DERECK WONG**

Southeast Region Director

*Dereck's Southwest region covers California, Nevada, and Arizona. A former national board member of Links Players, with long-time business, church, and country club involvement, Dereck made the move to the Links Players staff in 2008. You will appreciate his infectious desire for the growth of God's kingdom through Links Fellowships. You may reach Dereck initially at [dwong@linksplayers.com](mailto:dwong@linksplayers.com).*



## **JEFF HOPPER**

Chief Organizational Officer/Media Director

*If you call our national headquarters in California at 800-90-LINKS, you will likely find yourself talking to Jeff. As the developer of our materials for Links Fellowships, he is keenly aware of the nature of Fellowships. He is positioned to assist potential leaders in areas not covered by our regional directors. You may reach Jeff initially by phone or at [jhhopper@linksplayers.com](mailto:jhhopper@linksplayers.com).*

## THE GLOBAL CONNECTION

You have reached the end of this introduction to how you might start a Links Fellowship, and you still may be asking yourself, “Why does it matter that I team with Links Players? Can’t I just do this on my own?” Of course you can, and God may commission you to do just that. But we know from experience that there are some good reasons to team with Links Players. Here they are:

- **It costs nothing.** There is no financial obligation to Links Players to become a Links Fellowship. We ask only that your leadership team agrees to uphold the Links Player’s Mission.
- **The good name of Links Players.** Because Links Players has been around since 1980, many golfers around the world are already familiar with us.
- **The consortium of Fellowships.** Through the list of Fellowships that we keep updated on our web site, you can feel free to contact other local leaders to get a sense of what is working for them at their courses. You can also anticipate new participants who have found your Fellowship on our site.
- **Awareness of our activities and resources.** Through our web site and the monthly Links of Faith email newsletter for Fellowship leaders, you and your Fellowship are kept abreast of our many regional activities, as well as new resources being made available through Links Players.

Because of these advantages and the ministry opportunities available to you and your team, we would really like to encourage you to contact us today about starting a Links Fellowship. We know what God can do through you!

## BECOMING AN OFFICIAL LINKS FELLOWSHIP

We invite and encourage you to become an official Links Fellowship. This allows you to use the “Links Fellowship,” “Links Players,” or “Links Players Fellowship” names. We will include you in the communications we send to all Links Fellowships, list your group as a local Links Fellowship on our web site, and supply you with the Links Players logos for use in promoting your Fellowship.

In order to become an official Links Fellowship, we ask that you join us in ensuring a common mission among all groups identifying themselves in this way. This is accomplished by having the principal contact person and two other founding leaders in your group sign the Links Players Mission as stated below. *By having three people sign this statement, you are demonstrating a unity of commitment to the biblical doctrines of the Links Players Mission.* There is no other financial or administrative obligation to becoming a Links Fellowship.

### LINKS PLAYERS MISSION

**L**ove God and others, according to Matthew 22:37-39: *Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

**I**ntegrate Christ’s reign and authority into all of life, according to Matthew 6:33: *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

**N**etwork friends together in Christ, according to Acts 2:42: *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

**K**indle compassion for the poor and needy, according to Matthew 25:40: *“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”*

**S**hare Christ through the great game of golf, according to 2 Corinthians 5:20a: *We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though Christ were making his appeal through us.*

### SIGNATURES

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### FELLOWSHIP INFORMATION

Name of fellowship: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting when/where: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Send this completed sheet to Links Players International, 755 N. Peach Ave Suite E11, Clovis CA 93611.)*