

Links Players International Bible Study Series

THE LINKS PLAYERS COMMITMENT
Study 2 Integrate Christ's reign
and integrity into all of life

Linking golfers around the world in Christ

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The First Tee

WHAT IS A LINKS PLAYER?

A **LINKS PLAYER**, FIRST AND FOREMOST, IS A PERSON WHO HAS SAID YES TO JESUS CHRIST'S OFFER OF ETERNAL SALVATION. Usually this person is a golfer, but to follow the mission of a Links Player, you might be only a golf fan, or have little to do with golf at all. The mission of a Links Player has nothing to do with golf, really. But it has everything to do with life.

Of course, there is a lot more than the simple word "yes" to making a decision to give your life to Christ. In fact, it is a decision that must be coupled with a commitment.

Jesus told His disciples to consider the cost of following Him. This was only fair of Him, for He also made it clear that suffering would be part of the lot in a Jesus follower's life. Suffering, the Bible tells us, is the most significant way that God blesses us, for in trials we learn, we grow, and we are brought into fellowship with Jesus Himself.

If you have never made a decision to follow Jesus and enter into fellowship (relationship) with Him, this study will still have value for you. It will help you consider the cost of making such an important decision and commitment. If at any time during this study you decide you are ready to move into fellowship with Jesus Christ, we invite you to turn to page 19 and follow the simple guide to giving your life to Him.

For Links Players, the commitment to follow Christ means that they are willing to accept the mission of a Links Player. There's no magic formula to following Christ; we must live the whole of our lives for Him everyday. But the five points of the Links Players mission are designed specifically to help you remember what was most important to Christ and to encourage you to give top priority to those same five points in your own life.

Here they are:

L **LOVE GOD AND OTHERS.** Jesus confirmed that the two greatest commandments were these: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and Love your neighbor as yourself.

I **INTEGRATE CHRIST'S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE.** You can't have "just a little bit of Jesus." For this reason, Links Players find ways to walk like Jesus in all areas of life.

N **NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST.** Links Players understand that fellowship with other believers has great value in our walk as God's people.

K **KINDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY.** Jesus and His most prolific teacher, the apostle Paul, placed great emphasis on compassion for those in need. Links Players seek to incorporate this teaching into their own ministries.

S **SHARE CHRIST.** The walk with Christ is not a private stroll on a secluded path. We walk in the open, shining as a light that leads others to this wondrous life we have found.

In the eight-week study you are about to begin, we will look closely at the Bible's principles with regard to the first point of the Links Player's mission: Love God and others.

*Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory.
—1 Corinthians 10:31*

LESSON 1 THE SIZE OF DECISION

NEARLY EVERY GOLFER—AND CERTAINLY EVERY TOUR PROFESSIONAL—HAS FACED THAT GREATEST OF GOLF DICHOTOMIES: THE RISK-REWARD DECISION. Standing out in the fairway or on the tee of a challenging par-3 hole, you are forced to consider just what the shot is requiring of you, and what is the reward if you pull it off. Do you play for the middle of the green, satisfied with par, or dare you go at the flag looking for birdie but prepared to face the consequences if you miss the green on the tough short side of the hole?

Although amateurs rarely face such a decision with their livelihood on the line, it is just such situations we relish when we spectate on the course or from the comfort of our living rooms. We want to see what the best players in the world are willing to try when their successes—and more painfully—their failures will be televised for the world to see.

Interestingly, though we often fear ill choices and failing outcomes in our own lives, we have grown to love players like John Daly and Phil Mickelson, who are willing to "go for it" when the odds seem clearly against them. We admire their courage, even when they fail.

It is true, however, that we often shrink from such weighty choices in our own lives. That would not be a problem if we were motivated by honest evaluation rather than fear or doubt. In fact, it is important to remember that Jesus Christ Himself said that if we are interested in following Him, we should consider the cost of such a commitment.

When it comes to giving your life over to Christ's authority in your life, you are making a huge decision.

If you have been told that receiving Christ's offer of salvation is simple, you have been told the right thing. It is really a matter of words we call prayer and confession. We tell Christ we are sinners in need of Savior, and we tell Him that we believe He is that Savior and we are willing to put our faith in Him for the rest of our lives. That is not a lot of words. But such a prayer represents a monumental commitment.

LET'S CONSIDER THE CASES OF TWO MEN WHO FACED THE DECISION WHETHER TO FOLLOW CHRIST DURING HIS TIME OF EARTHLY MINISTRY. Both men were successful, identified in Scripture as wealthy. But one was known to have gained his wealth unscrupulously, while the other was highly ethical in his dealings. Which do you think was more ready to follow Christ?

QUESTION

When was the last time you chose to hit the risky shot on the golf course? What was the result?

QUESTION

When was the last time you chose to take a risk in life? What was the result of that choice?

QUESTION

How would you say success is defined in your circles of interaction and influence?

The story of the first man is told in Luke 19. His name was Zacchaeus, and he was a tax collector. If that profession doesn't conjure up buckets of respect from you now, be assured that in Jesus' time, tax collectors were even more vilified. They were not only agents of the government, they were Jewish "traitors" working for an occupying government, and they earned their income by tacking on to the government's take whatever amount they thought reasonable. Suffice it to say that what the tax collectors deemed reasonable and what the taxpayers deemed so was miles apart.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read the full story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 and the full story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-30.

Yet Jesus called Zacchaeus' name. Jesus came to Zacchaeus' hometown of Jericho and invited Himself for the next meal.

Zacchaeus, a proud man, was certainly willing to have this eminent rabbi in *his* home. Jesus hadn't called on any other

man. He had chosen Zacchaeus, a "sinner" in the eyes of the town. But it did not take long for Zacchaeus' pride to melt. He realized he was not being called out because he was best, but because he was worst. In spite of his sin, Jesus wanted to know him.

Now Zacchaeus was faced with a choice of his own. Would he make this more than a one-day affair? Would he turn his heart and his life to Jesus?

In the later lines of Zacchaeus' brief story we gain not only his answer, but the fullness of commitment that his answer meant. Zacchaeus, in response to Jesus' attention to him and love for him, vowed to give half his possessions to the poor and repay those from whom he had stolen four times the amount. That's counting the cost—then counting out the money it took to meet that cost. That is also integrating the rule of Christ into all of life, including the part that "most belonged" to him.

IN ANOTHER OF THE GOSPELS, MATTHEW, THE STORY IS TOLD OF A SECOND WEALTHY MAN. This man was not only rich, but he also held a position of governmental leadership. Jesus did not approach this man, but he approached Jesus. His question of Christ was the most important one a person can ask, "What good must I do to have eternal life?"

Jesus responded by listing a series of Old Testament commands. The man, who was young, answered that he had kept all of these commands. He was, then, a man of lawful righteousness. He was ethically conscious, a trait we would be quick to admire in our own slippery times.

Jesus commended the man for his path in life, but then he presented the man with one more direction: "Sell all you have and give it to the poor." The New Testament is quite clear; we cannot earn our way to eternity through a collection of good deeds (see Ephesians 2:8,9). But Jesus also taught that we cannot serve two masters. Our love for one will keep us from serving the other.

When Jesus told the young man that he had to sell his possessions, He forced him to consider which master he would serve in life. The man went away sad because, we are told, "he had many possessions." He was unwilling to do what Zacchaeus had done, to put his faith in action in his own life. He was unwilling to allow Christ to be his authority.

QUESTION

What would you consider your own greatest challenge in integrating Christ's reign into your life?

THE STORIES OF THESE TWO MEN FORCE US TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND ASK AND ANSWER TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR OWN CHOICES.

Are we willing to make Christ our leader in life? The second aspect of the Links Player's commitment is to allow Christ to reign as King of our daily lives. We must

integrate His authority and integrity into every aspect of living—in our families, our businesses, our churches, and our neighborhoods. We must pursue ethical, righteous living—not for the sake of ethics or righteousness, but for the sake of glorifying God in all we do. In the lessons to come, we hope you will be encouraged to make and to live by some very critical choices.

GAME ON! More and more professional golfers are strengthening their games through cross-training workouts. You might hook up with a trainer who can develop a similar program that will work for you.

To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband. —Ephesians 5:33

LESSON 2 ONE-TO-ONE FAITH

GOLFERS OFTEN SPEAK OF COURSES THAT FIT THEIR GAME OR HOLES THAT SET UP WELL FOR THEIR EYE. What they mean, of course, is that when they stand on the tee and their eyes view the hole before them, they layer that information upon what they know to be their prevailing ball flight, and they feel—or don't feel—comfortable.

QUESTION

Name a place where you feel completely comfortable in life. How about an activity where you enjoy full confidence?

There's no denying it: Comfort is closely akin to confidence. When we have "a good feeling" about something, we have hope for the future based on what is going on inside our minds and our guts right now. This can be as simple as a golf shot, or as advanced as a significant life decision.

Investors, for instance, are as diverse as golfers. Their differing needs, the length of time they can keep their money invested, and their relative feeling about opportunities that are aggressive versus those that are conservative—all of these factors play into the "comfort level" each investor has with a particular stock, fund, real estate option, or business partnership. A business opportunity that is "just right" for one investor may be altogether wrong for another, even though those investors' portfolios may look a lot alike.

IN THE WORLD, WE ARE ALSO VARIOUSLY COMFORTABLE WITH WHAT SURROUNDS US. We choose different neighborhoods in which to live, different careers to pursue, different friends with whom we associate, even different modes of transportation based on our needs, our wants, our goals, our interests, and our personalities. We are going to be different, no doubt.

QUESTION

As you reflect on it now, what is a worldly interest, activity or habit with which you have grown too comfortable?

But here is one way in which we never want to be the same, not if we are followers of Christ: We never want to grow comfortable with the things of this world.

Jesus established that while we are *in* this world, we are not *of* this world. The apostle Peter went so far as to call us aliens here, strangers in the land (1 Peter 2:11).

The meaning of all this can be difficult to flesh out in terms of practical living—until we look at it in the specific places where we live our lives. There is no escaping our families, for instance. So we must learn how to live a life of faith among them, even when they are hurtful, disagreeable people. In the same way, we go to work, and we must live for Christ there. We have neighbors, and we must "shine the light of Christ" before them.

SO LET'S BEGIN RIGHT AT HOME. The most intimate human relationship each of us will ever attain should be the relationship we have with our husband or wife. While God will ask some people to remain unmarried throughout their lives for purposes all His own, the vast majority of us will, for a portion of our lives at least, be married. And whether you are married or single, you know the immense value of an excellent marital relationship. You have spent time with couples who get along famously and those who do little more than tolerate one another. A marriage built on Christ can have a life-giving influence on every other relationship the couple has.

But attaining such a relationship is not magic. It requires submission to the Holy Spirit, for His fruit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

QUESTION

What specific ideas do you have for bringing Christ to your marriage?

(Galatians 5:22-23). You don't need to visit a marriage counselor to see how those traits can revolutionize your own marital relationship!

We are left, then, with one great goal in our marriages—to bring Christ to them, in the same way that we would introduce an admired new friend to a beloved old friend. And if we are to integrate Christ's reign into all areas of our lives, we must make Him King in all corners of His kingdom, right into our own bedroom.

WITH THAT IN MIND, WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT GODLY MARRIAGES? WHAT MARKS THEM AS CHRIST'S? The best answer is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where the apostle wrote of the mutual sacrifice of both partners in a marriage:

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church...Husbands, love your wives as also Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her in the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:22-23a,25-26).

Two things jump out as critical when we read this passage:

1. For both the husband and the wife, *the example is Christ*. Christ heads the church; husbands are made head over their wives. Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for it; husbands are to love their wives and give themselves up for their wives.

2. *These aspects must be endlessly intertwined*. A husband should not expect submission from a wife to whom he is not showing complete love, nor should a wife expect complete love from her husband when she refuses to submit to him.

Christian marriage counselors and writers have much to say about how this kind of mutual love and respect can be practiced and improved between a couple. We cannot take the time or space here to examine marriage with such depth. But we can challenge one another to make our marriage what God intended it to be: a reflection of the relationship between His Son and His Son's church.

QUESTION

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being strongest, how would you assess the level of trust in your marriage?

Becoming more like Christ and introducing His reign into a marriage is to bring His integrity there, too. Among all possible traits of the relationship, trust is needed most in a marriage.

Giving trust means risk. It gives license to another person—license to act freely, even when the one who has given the license is not there. Is there risk in such an arrangement? Plenty—unless the commitment to give trust is met by an equal commitment to earn it. Again, the Christlikeness must be utterly mutual if the marriage is going to reach its highest potential.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Is it time for you to bring Christ to your marriage? Let us strongly recommend that you give priority to this relationship by meeting with a trusted friend, counselor, or pastor who can advise you on books to read, videos to watch, or seminars to attend to improve your marriage.

GAME ON! When tracking your game, keep more than the score. Log fairways and greens hit, as well as the number of putts you take. These personal records can help you practice more specifically for your needs.

Honor your father and mother...and fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. —Ephesians 6:2,4

LESSON 3 GOD'S HOUSEHOLD Bringing Christ home

THE 1999 U.S. OPEN WAS MARKED BY A SHOWDOWN OF TWO GREAT FAMILY MEN. The first of those was champion Payne Stewart, whose 20-foot putt on the 72nd hole gave him the victory over Phil Mickelson. In his post-victory interviews, Stewart made public for the first time his newfound dependence on Jesus Christ. It was a faith, he said, that had been provoked in him by his wife and children.

Meanwhile, Mickelson had amazed the golfing world by announcing that if the call came from his pregnant wife, Amy, he would walk off the golf course and get to the hospital. The Mickelsons' first child was due that week, and the fact that Mickelson—at the time still "the best player never to have won a major"—was playing in the final group on Sunday at the U.S. Open had no bearing on his decision.

QUESTION

How much does your family mean to you? Are there times when you wish you could do more for them or with them?

Each of us, in whatever walk of life, and possessing whatever abilities and accomplishments that God has enabled in us, will be motivated in different ways and to different degrees. Some men and women will be deeply committed to the development of their careers, others to the pursuit of adventure, and others still to the building of personal relationships.

What we can confirm from Scripture, however, is that every follower of Christ must be strongly committed to certain aspects of life. Foremost among those, of course, is a growing relationship with Christ Himself. But also high on the list of what God desires us to value are the members of our own family. From the earliest books of the Old Testament right through the letters written by the early church apostles, respect for the members of our own earthly family shows up as a top priority in living the life of Christ's kingdom.

When it comes time to integrate Christ's reign and authority into our lives, we must begin with our families.

BEYOND OUR SPOUSES, WHOM WE CONSIDERED IN THE PREVIOUS LESSON, WE ARE TO RESPECT WHOLEHEARTEDLY OUR PREDECESSORS AND OUR DESCENDANTS. For most of us, that means we are to pay close attention to our parents and close attention to our children.

QUESTION

How would you describe your relationship with your parents? What can you be praying for on their behalf?

Let's begin with that first group: our parents. If you are a younger person engaged in this study, your grandparents may still be living, and certainly you must honor them as well. But your first obligation, Scripturally is to your parents (your parents are the first line of responsibility for caring for your grandparents). The relationship between you and your parents was formed by God even before you met your spouse, and it is one you are not allowed to dismiss simply because you are an adult or because you have a family of your own.

If your relationship includes Christ as a common bond, you have a wonderful—and increasingly unusual—advantage. You may support your parents as they pursue Christ. You may show how much you respect their godly wisdom by seeking their opinion on matters of family experience, where they may help you think through big decisions. And you may ask them to pray with you regarding important developments in your life and the life of your family (your parents can be some of your children's most powerful intercessors!).

If, on the other hand, Christ is not revered by your parents as He is in your home, you must use a two-faceted approach to bringing Christ into your relationship with your parents. First, you must pray for them. Primarily, this means seeking the Lord's provision for their souls. Ask that He give you the words to say to your parents that will awaken them to Christ; and if it cannot be you, ask that He will bring people into their lives who will speak the truth of Christ to them. Second, you must live Christ before them—not in a haughty way, but in humility and with absolute consistency.

Remember, you cannot bring your parents—or anyone else, for that matter—to Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. But God will certainly choose to use us as conduits of His true Word and the Good News of salvation through Christ as we live before others, including our families.

QUESTION

How much of your approach to parenting has been formed by what you have learned from Scripture? And how much Scripture have you passed on to your children?

BUT IF WE HAVE CHILDREN, OUR CALLING TO THEM IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT IN GOD'S EYES. In the Old Testament instruction through Moses, parents were charged with the spiritual responsibility of teaching their children the ways of the Lord:

"Impress these words of Mine on your hearts and souls, bind them as a sign on your hands, and let them be a symbol on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 11:18-19).

Our role as instructors of our children can lead to playing the difficult role of disciplinarian as well. But as the Bible tells us that God disciplines those He loves, we should follow His example. We must keep our children in line. How do we do this in a Christlike fashion? By appealing to the truth. Don't hold your children to your preferences or to the standards that will make you look good in your friend's eyes. Hold them to God's Word, just as you hold yourself to it (how's that for a gut check?).

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

There are a lot of Bible teachers who offer opinions on parenting. Perhaps you have read some of the many Christian parenting books available, or you have heard these teachers speak. Convey some of the ideas you have read, heard, or gathered through the years to your group. Together weigh these ideas against Scripture. Are you parenting in a way that brings Christ to your children?

Paul wrote to the fathers in the church at Ephesus: "Don't exasperate your children" (Ephesians 6:4). That's an amazing reminder in our time, for all too often you hear parents complain of how their children exasperate them. Yet God never gave that warning to children. God wants us to treat our children rightly, even when they behave wrongly. That makes sense because that is precisely how He treats us!

Parenting is not easy. In fact, we are all "first time parents," who will make our share of mistakes. But if you meet your children with honesty, integrity and respect—just as you are to relate to your spouse—you will find success at bringing Christ into your home. He will reside there not just as a religious icon, a great philosophical ideal, or a moral example. No, He will live there as the One who

brings comfort in times of struggle, confidence in times of worry, hope in times of defeat, and joy in times of triumph. The living God will truly live "in the midst of us" (Jeremiah 14:9, KJV).

GAME ON! Don't ever leave a lesson shaking your head. Ask the questions that help you understand the reasons behind what the pro is telling you. This way, you'll improve at identifying and correcting your own swing flaws as time goes on.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.
—Colossians 3:23

LESSON 4 WHATEVER YOUR WORK God on the job

IT'S TRUE. MOST ALL OF US HAVE DREAMED OF OTHER WORK. The life of a tour professional, for instance, seems to carry a lot of excitement. After all, who wouldn't want to play golf everyday for a living? And wow, there sure is a lot of money to be made, not only in winnings but via endorsements and perks as well!

The truth is, however, that professional golf has room for only so many players. And when that *everyday* part really does become everyday, you suddenly have an entirely different dynamic at work. Could your body hold up? Would you tire of the travel? And is it even possible that the mundanity of the routine would lead to out-and-out boredom?

Like most things in life—and certainly most other jobs—professional golf has its good side and its bad side, times that thrill and times that grow old.

AND YET AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, WE ARE EXHORTED TO DO OUR WORK WELL. The idea was packed not only into Paul's quick word to the Colossians—"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23, NIV)—but into his several letters that included encouragement to slaves to give their masters their all.

Right away, this whole idea begs some key questions:

- What about my family? How will I spend the necessary time with them when the boss asks me to work late or a project demands a huge chunk of my time?
- I know God doesn't want me to be given over to money, serving the dollar rather than Him. How do I avoid this imbalance?
- Isn't it just as bad to be a workaholic as it is to be any other kind of "-aholic"? How can I steer clear of working too hard or too much?
- What if I am asked to commit an impropriety, as others have been pressured into doing in recent years? Where will I find the strength to stand for integrity?

If you are asking such questions, you are right where you need to be: in the thick of considering what God wants for your life and what others may say will make life worth living. Let's see what kind of wisdom we can gather in this matter.

FIRST, CONSIDER THE METAPHOR OF YOUR HEART. When we speak of the heart, we often speak not of the literal biological organ but instead of the things that are deepest within you. So when you give someone—say an employer or a client—"all your heart," you are giving them the best you have. Not only that, but when we speak of where our secrets are kept, again we talk about our heart. So when we give someone "all our heart," we are giving them the fullness of our honesty. We aren't burying secrets at the expense of our integrity (which, when we call ourselves followers of Christ, is really God's integrity!).

A QUICK ASSIGNMENT

Take a good look at your own line of work. Draw up a pair of side-by-side lists, one containing the things you enjoy about the job or career, the other showing things that wear on you or present regular challenges. Now you can be honest in considering the work God has provided for you.

FOR DISCUSSION

Describe a time when your integrity was challenged on the job. How did you respond to this situation? Would you have done anything differently according to the faith and wisdom you have today?

So we guard the twin pillars of integrity in our work: honesty and fairness.

When it comes to honesty, our work must be what we present it to be. If we are producing for clients or customers, we must give them quality commensurate with the price they pay. And we must back our work with guarantees that hold us accountable. If we are producing for investors, we must provide them with a fully accurate

picture of our financial progress and future plans. If we are producing for an employer, we must give them honest hours of work, not distracted by affairs that belong away from the office.

When it comes to fairness, we work as hard for one client as for another. We address them all with dignity, even if they are undignified in their approach to us. Will every customer be satisfied? Almost certainly not. But if we are fair to each customer, putting forth our best effort, God will be satisfied. And He is the One we "work as unto."

AFTER ESTABLISHING A FOUNDATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN OUR WORK, REFLECTING CHRIST IN WHAT WE SAY AND DO, WE MUST STILL CONSIDER THE QUESTIONS OF HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH, BOTH IN TERMS OF WORK EFFORT AND FINANCIAL GAIN.

In the past, when men and women worked in agrarian settings or trades, their children were with them much of the day. It was easier to find the work-home balance. But we are long since removed from those days, and often spouses or parents find it a trick to keep work at work and home at home.

To begin, take a breath here. There is a certain degree of falsehood that all work should stay at work. For instance, you and your spouse are one. If you cannot share with one another the triumphs and trials of your days on the job, you will find yourselves bound up emotionally, which can add greatly to whatever stress you may be feeling. Take time as necessary to share with one another the matters of the day. Listening to one another and sharing each other's stories will serve as an important ministry to each other in your marriage. As your children grow older, you may be able to invite them into the conversation at times as well.

But here is a key passage in finding the balance between work and the rest of life. Indeed, Christ called it the key passage of all: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength."

There's that "all your heart" business again. But notice how it is associated with other ways to love God as well. Particularly, the "all your strength" phrase reminds us that we need rest and exercise and a solid diet if we are to keep going at all. These practices will keep us from workaholism.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To find out how other business people have found a place for Christ in their careers, read some of the outstanding stories in *The Transparent Leader*, by Dwight Johnson (also available on CD).

But loving God with "all your soul" is the best check of all. If you take time each day for "soul work"—time reading Scripture and offering your day to God in prayer—you will achieve the balance you seek most as a follower of Christ.

GAME ON! Have you ever asked for a putting lesson? Not many players do. Yet there are a few key principles that can improve your play on the greens, both from up close and when you need to lag from far away.

For although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win more people. —1 Corinthians 9:19

LESSON 5 A CHAPLAIN ON YOUR BLOCK Loving your neighbors

YOU MAY NOT BE AWARE THAT EACH OF THE MAJOR PROFESSIONAL GOLF TOURS HAS CHAPLAIN. This person, as you might imagine, encourages players in their walk with Christ. They do this through formal teaching at a weekly Bible study, but just as often they do this work through one-on-one relationships with the players. Many players credit their initial understanding of Christ to the time a circumstance in life forced them to consider matters of the heart. Not sure where else to go, they sought spiritual guidance. What they found was Jesus Christ.

TELL ME A STORY

If you are interested in the personal stories of professional tour players who walk with Christ, you can explore many of these at www.linksplayers.com under the Player Profiles section.

For whatever reason, words take various connotative meanings in our language. While a *priest* and a *preacher* perform quite similar work, for instance, the picture we have of each in our minds is rather different. We might envision a priest as robed, as kind, as Catholic. A preacher, on the other hand, may come to our minds as someone in a suit, waving a Bible, and definitely Protestant.

Society in general conjures up images of each of these kinds of spiritual leaders as well. The same is true for *minister* or *reverend* or *pastor*. As positive as our own pictures of these leaders might be, the truth is that those who have little to do with Christianity aren't painting such wonderful mental pictures. Many are suspicious of those who lead from the pulpit in a church, especially when those leaders start talking about money.

BUT THERE IS ONE TITLE THAT REMAINS FRIENDLY IN NEARLY ALL QUARTERS. THAT TITLE IS *CHAPLAIN*. Perhaps we have M*A*S*H to thank for this. Father Mulcahy was a beloved figure, welcomed by everyone in the unit, even if they weren't all that adherent to his morality. He was there during their toughest times, emoting with them as an empathetic friend. And the fact that he was a friend with some sort of connection to the Almighty made his presence that much more welcome.

QUESTION

What images come to your mind when you think of a chaplain?

Wherever the positive connotation of *chaplain* comes from, we'll take it. In fact, the purpose of this lesson is to inspire you to be a chaplain in your own neighborhood.

We know from our previous set of studies on *Loving God and Others* that when Jesus confirmed that one of the two greatest commandments is to love our neighbor as ourselves, He was then asked who our neighbors are. Jesus responded with a parable that conveyed, in essence, that anyone who comes our way with a need—no matter how distant their relationship to us—is our neighbor.

Let's place ourselves in the most real context today. Our neighbors are those who surround us in our physical world. Their house may back up to ours. Their office may be right next door. They may own the shop three doors down. The old adage says, "You can't choose your family." But even if we move to the most exclusive neighborhood in town, we can't choose our neighbors either. And yet we are called to love them.

One of the simplest ways to integrate the life of Christ in you into the life of your "neighborhood," is to receive the commission of *chaplain* among your neighbors.

TO MOVE TOWARD BECOMING SUCH A CHAPLAIN, YOU NEED TO GAIN THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS. Don't

expect that these are all traits that will come naturally. Rather, through prayer seek God's hand in establishing these spiritual traits in your life.

1 Openly display your faith in God. Unlike Father Mulcahy, you won't be wearing a clerical collar. There are only two ways people will know that God is an integral part of your life: show and tell. You may do something as simple as keeping a Bible out on your desk at the office or mentioning in a casual conversation something about your family's church activity. The idea at this stage of your relationship is not to "deliver the Gospel." What you want to convey with this soft approach is this: *If you ever have need to talk about God, I am someone with whom you can do that.*

2 Open your Bible to gain wisdom. As a chaplain, you will be asked for your opinion, advice, and wisdom. If people see a foundation in your life that steadily holds you up in rough times, they will come to you in rough times, too. Many of their problems will not be problems you have experienced yourself. In such times, you will want to be able to draw from God's Word to give your neighbors wisdom for the situations they face.

3 Open your home. Chapels are often open 24 hours a day. You may not be able to open your home or office that frequently, but you want to give your neighbors the sense that they are welcome to drop in for an iced tea and a chat—whether or not it is about spiritual matters. (On the job, if you are not your own employer, you will need to take into account the policies of your workplace and perhaps redirect people to a time more appropriate for talking.)

4 Open your heart to the needs of people. Is there a problem you'd rather not face? You probably won't have this options as a chaplain in your neighborhood. If your heart is broken by the needs of others, let it be broken. God heals hearts. He will heal the brokenness of your neighbors, and He will heal your heart as well if it is broken in empathy with those who come to you.

5 Open your ears to God's timing. Many times you may hesitate to speak into the life of someone who has approached you with a spiritual question or personal problem. The best form of "counsel" is often prayer. As soon as you are overwhelmed, you may simply ask, "Would it be all right if I prayed for you?" If you receive a "yes" in response, you can then say, "Let's do that right now. And I will also ask God to give me any words of wisdom He might have for me to share with you." Then pray—over the person's specific problem and over your desire for wisdom to help.

QUESTION

What changes need to occur in your life and your character in order for to become a chaplain among your neighbors?

In final reflection, we would do well to remember that our task as a chaplain bearing the name of Christ among our neighbors is exactly the job God has set us aside to do:

Now everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that

is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the ministry of reconciliation to us (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

GAME ON! True par is a very good score for all but the best players. You'll relieve some tension and enjoy your own game more if you build a "personal par" for some of your favorite courses.

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. —Romans 12:3

LESSON 6 OPEN AND HONEST The value of truth-telling

TOUR PROFESSIONAL WENDY WARD ONCE PENALIZED HERSELF IN AN **LPGA** TOURNAMENT FOR SOMETHING SHE DID NOT EVEN SEE HAPPEN! Ward set her ball down on the green and removed her marker in preparation to putt. Then she looked up from the ball to assess her line one last time. When she looked down at the ball again, it had moved. No one had actually *seen* the ball move, mind you. And its actual movement had been ever-so-slight. But Ward knew that she set her ball down in precisely the same position every time, and this ball had moved. She stepped back and called the appropriate one-shot penalty on herself, then she putted out.

QUESTION

What is the best example of sportsmanship on the golf course you have ever seen or read about?

As golfers, we often pride ourselves on the integrity of our game. If we are "brought up properly" in the game, we are taught not only elements of course management and how to swing but also the rules of the game. Beyond that, we are taught golf etiquette. And of higher principle still, we are taught to maintain the honor of the game.

This honor calls upon each competitor to divulge his or her own transgressions. Whereas in other sports athletes would not be expected to overrule the judgments of the officials, in golf players are praised for calling proper penalties on themselves.

Which leads us to one of the highest forms of honor in God's kingdom. It is the integration of truth into our lives.

LET'S BEGIN HERE: GOD IS ALL ABOUT TRUTH.

This is true for God the Father:

Into Your hand I entrust my spirit; You redeem me LORD, God of truth (Psalm 31:5).

It is true for Christ the Son:

The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only on from the Father, full of truth and grace (John 1:14).

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

It is true for the Holy Spirit:

[Jesus said], "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

...And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6).

Jonathan Schwartz, the Chief Operational Officer of Sun Microsystems has said, "Ultimately, everything is personal." Schwartz was not attempting to offer biblical truth when he made this observation, but he hit on a key element of integrating Christ's reign and integrity into our lives. We cannot

QUESTION

How important is it to you to understand attributes of God, such as truth? What kind of spiritual foundation is provided when we look deeply at God Himself?

QUESTION

Truth telling is one spiritual trait best upheld in partnership with someone who can help hold you accountable. Among your friends, who can be such a partner for you?

stand back and say, "Well, of course God is truth and full of truth, but I'm only me. You can't expect me to tell the truth all the time." Here's the rub: In the midst of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made everything He taught personal when He said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Theologians will tell you that *perfect* as Jesus used it means "complete."

If we are moving toward completion in Christ, one trait we will gain more and more is truthfulness. We must learn to tell the truth in every aspect of our lives.

OFTEN, WE CAN BE AIDED BY TAKING AN INVENTORY. Insurance agents advise you to make an inventory of the valuables in your home, in case you ever must recover from a catastrophic loss. Financial advisors help you take an inventory of your assets and liabilities, so they can help you determine—and improve—your net worth. An inventory can help, too, in opening our eyes to the areas in our lives where we need to be truthful:

CHECKLIST OF TRUTH

- We must be truthful in our worship (see John 4:24), praising God not only in church but in every arena of life.
- We must be truthful in our words (see Psalm 34:12-13), not exaggerating our complaints or falsely representing our circumstances or those of others.
- We must be truthful in our feelings (see Proverbs 10:18), so that we do not hold in emotions that fester into resentment or self-pity.
- We must be truthful in our finances (see Acts 5:3), because truth and trust are so firmly intertwined. We cannot be trusted as managers with integrity unless we are fully truthful—to our customers, our shareholders, our boards, and our employees.
- We must be truthful about our strengths (see 2 Corinthians 7:14-16), not holding back from helping in the ways that God has gifted us to do so.
- We must be truthful in our weaknesses (see Romans 12:3), for in laying our weaknesses on the table, we can seek the work of God in helping us work with them and through them.
- We must be truthful with our families (see Ephesians 6:2-3), where honor for one another is best given through honesty. Again, trust is built on truth.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

This week, read the passages that accompany the Checklist of Truth. See how God wants us to be truthful in all arenas of life.

- We must be truthful with our relationships (see James 5:16), especially open in confession, so that we may pray for one another.
- We must be truthful in our work (see Colossians 3:23), giving all our hearts—both in effort and in honesty.

- We must be truthful in our play (see Ecclesiastes 9:8 and 1 Corinthians 10:31), choosing only recreation and entertainment that upholds the God of eternal purpose.

GAME ON! When the weather starts to turn, be quick to look for changes in the distances you are hitting each of your clubs. Getting these right will help you get the ball close more often.

Dishonest scales are detestable to the LORD, but an accurate weight is His delight.

—Proverbs 11:1

LESSON 7 RIGHT AND WRONG The ethical example of Daniel

WHEN IT COMES TO A TRICKY RULING ON THE GOLF COURSE, TOUR PLAYERS KNOW JUST WHERE TO TURN. They call on rules officials. These men and women, trained to know the rules cold and apply them inerrantly, hustle to the scene of the question and help troubled players sort through their options.

In life, the questions aren't always so easy, nor are the answers.

QUESTION

What is one of the toughest ethical questions you have had to face in your own experience?

Consider the case of the prophet Daniel, a man whose simple commitment to God and prayer made him a target for jealous, scheming enemies. These men hatched a plan to eliminate Daniel, not only from his position as the king's most trusted advisor, but from life itself. They proposed the king write a binding law that would require his subjects to worship him only. And anyone who didn't do this would be tossed to the lions.

It was a plan of wicked design, and in nearly every case it would have been effective at squelching all acts of faith or worship. But Daniel was a different sort of man. Where most people would have agonized over what to do now that they were told they could not worship God at the risk of their life, Daniel's reaction required little decision making. Read:

When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upper room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before (Daniel 6:10).

As you might imagine, the account of Daniel's righteous choice is one of many like it in Scripture, a choice that came in the face of great consequences. Today, when we encounter such a situation, we call it a matter of ethics—how do we choose the godly course when presented with a difficult choice? And ethics are the bottom line for integrating Christ's reign and integrity into every dark corner of our lives. If Christ really is our King, we will accept the challenge of making the choices He would make were He in our shoes.

TO ASSIST US IN OUR STUDY OF HOW WE ADOPT A "CHRIST-IAN" SET OF ETHICAL CHOICES, LET'S RETURN TO THE ACCOUNT OF DANIEL. From this remarkable man of God we can draw three great principles for making ethical choices:

1 Knowledge of God. Daniel's moral and ethical strength was not his own. He had been taught the law of God as a young man, and this knowledge became more and more real for Daniel through the years as he (1) obeyed the principles of the law, (2) gave his praise and petition to God in prayer, and (3) witnessed the work of God in his own life and in the life of his friends.

2 Consistent commitment to God. In the account of Daniel's response to the king's deadly proclamation, we find this essential phrase: "...just as he had done before." Daniel's spiritual disciplines—in this case prayer—were ingrained. Whatever circumstances arose around him, Daniel was prepared to remain faithful to God, because he had established an unbreakable practice in his life.

3 Allowing God to be judge. Daniel's very name is important in examining his life story. Daniel's name literally meant, "God is judge." By remembering the meaning of his own

QUESTION

What changes are necessary in your own life to make God your judge?

name, Daniel knew where to turn in every situation. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes is among those who have adopted this slogan: "An Audience of One." By adhering to this principle on the athletic field or in the many fields of life, we can make progress like Daniel did, for God alone will be our judge. The men who conned the king into laying a trap for Daniel counted on him to turn his eyes in their direction and heed what they had done. They were wrong. Daniel's eyes looked in only one direction: Godward.

THERE IS ANOTHER REASON WE SHOULD LOOK TO DANIEL'S EXAMPLE IN OUR LIVES, HOWEVER. It is because Daniel's life was shaped like many of our lives today. You may not always find that to be true in Scripture. As you read the Bible, you may be tempted to dismiss the godly decisions made by the men and women you read about there. They lived so long ago. Their experiences were so different from ours. They wouldn't understand what we go through.

But in the case of Daniel, we simply cannot make such excuses. Here's why:

QUESTION

What excuses have you made in your life that now face the challenge of Daniel's example?

- Like many of us, Daniel was "a victim of circumstances." Early in his life, a hostile king had invaded his native land and carted off most of the people. Then he took the most accomplished young men and trained them for his court.

- As in our time, the culture taught things contrary to Daniel's upbringing. Daniel might have been tempted to say, "That's the way things are done here. I'll just go along and not make waves." Many people in our time employ a similar line of reasoning. They say, "That's the way things are done now. I'll live this way so I don't look odd." In each of these situations, however, Daniel chose to do what was right. (Be sure to read the story in Daniel 1, where Daniel had to negotiate for righteousness, then count on God's faithful protection.)

- In the same way it happens to us today, the rules around Daniel kept changing. Kings (and dynasties) changed during Daniel's long stay in Babylon. One king called on his people to worship this god; the next chose another god. One said pray here; the next said pray there. It would have been easy for Daniel to just throw up his hands and go along. He did not. As we have already noted, he simply could not break from his righteous habits.

- Toughest of all, Daniel was subject to human authorities with the power to kill him. In our time, many people stray from ethics because they fear the opinion of the public or the power of those in charge. But Daniel lived under authoritarian kings who thought little of putting a man to death for straying outside the king's bidding. Today, we have not only the example of Daniel, but also the words of Jesus as our challenge: "And I say to you, My friends, don't fear those who kill the body and after that can do nothing more. But I will show you the One to fear: Fear Him who has authority to throw people into hell after death" (Luke 12:4-5). Now that's making God our judge!

FOR FURTHER STUDY

If you have never read the story of Daniel and his friends, be sure to read the book of Daniel, chapters 1-6. But look as well to the account of Joseph, beginning in Genesis 36. Joseph was another man of godly integrity.

GAME ON! Most folks don't care what you shoot as long as you know how to keep play moving. If you're new to the game, ask your friends for some tips on speeding things up. It might be a good reminder to them, too!

"Therefore, get your minds ready for action, being self-disciplined..." —1 Peter 1:13

LESSON 8 REVIEW AND ADVANCE

FOR SEVEN LESSONS NOW, WE HAVE CONSIDERED THE SECOND ASPECT OF BEING A LINKS PLAYER IN DEPTH. Now let's spend a day reviewing what we have studied and consider how we might enact this principle in our lives. James wrote, "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves...the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who acts—this person will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22,25). So let's make it our goal today to move from study to practice.

In review, answer the following questions:

1. What is the second aspect of being a Links Player?

2. In your words, what does it mean to integrate Christ into the decisions of your life?

3. What are key marks of a godly marriage?

4. According to Scripture, what is a primary thing we should be giving to our children?

5. How does honesty relate to working for your employer with "all your heart"?

6. How can serving as "a chaplain in your neighborhood" help you minister?

7. In what ways has your understanding of God's truth and His love of truth been expanded?

8. How will the lesson of Daniel help you as you stand for righteousness?

QUESTION

How can simplifying the truths of Scripture move you to action?

This is just a simple review, but as golfers we know that simple is often safest. When we reduce our swing thoughts to a few simple ideas, we usually make great progress.

In simple terms, then, we have seven possibilities for integration from this set of lessons about bringing Christ's reign and integrity into all of life: (1) making godly decisions, (2) loving our spouses, (3) leading our children, (4) serving our employers and customers, (5) shining as Christ's light in our neighborhood, (6) telling the truth, and (7) standing in righteousness.

What is one way that you can commit to integrating Christ into your life in the next 24 hours?

IF YOU ARE DOING THIS STUDY AS PART OF A GROUP, YOUR GROUP SHOULD TAKE SOME TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE IDEAS YOU HAVE RECORDED FOR INTEGRATING CHRIST'S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE.¹ There are three critical advantages to doing this. You may recognize the first two from the business world. First, your good ideas may generate good ideas for others. Second, others may have resources that can help you with your own idea. But the third reason to present your ideas to others is the most important—so they can affirm and pray for you as you go forward with implementing your plan.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what to pray for others. Beyond healing in a time of sickness or relief in a time of trouble, our tongues are often tied when it comes to prayer. Having a list of each other's commitments to integrating Christ into their lives in the days to come should help you as you talk to God. Ask God to encourage your friends, even as He encourages you.

Don't forget the follow-up here, either. In the days to come, call your friends and ask them about how they are progressing. Even with prayer, our best plans don't always go smoothly. This can be particularly true if we are attempting to integrate Christ into areas of our lives where we have shut Him out in the past. That's when it is good to have a friend call to listen to your story and pray with you again.

AS WE CLOSE THIS STUDY, LET'S DO SO AS CHANGED PEOPLE. Christ's saving work in our life has made us new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). But it can take a while to get used to this "new skin." Each day your life is going to be tainted by sin, whether you seek it out or you step in it without seeing it coming. But we are a people freed by Christ, and we do not need to dwell on our failures. We need to stand on the truth of His forgiveness, confessing our sins to Him and moving on in His grace (see 1 John 1:9).

Today let's make a fresh commitment to allow Christ into every corner of our lives as our reigning King and our example in righteousness.

¹Large groups may need to break up into smaller groups of 3-5 in order to best accomplish the exchange of ideas and prayer for one another. If, on the other hand, you are not in a group, write out your commitment and hand it to a friend who will call you in the next few days to ask how you are progressing and to pray for you.

FOR GROUP LEADERS USING THIS STUDY

IT CAN BE DAUNTING TO BE CALLED ON TO TEACH THE WORD OF GOD. Indeed, many potential leaders have told us that while they are capable of and eager to bring a group together, or to act as host, teaching is an entirely different level, one for which they do not consider themselves prepared.

QUESTION

Why are you being called upon to lead a Bible study group? In what way do you feel best prepared?

Other don't feel so much weight when it comes to teaching. They know their Bibles well, or they're naturals when speaking to a crowd.

It is, then, the precise goal of the structure of these Links Players Bible studies to provide a fully operational Bible study for those teachers who need much assistance and yet a format that leaves room for experienced leaders to bring their own learning to the table.

In each lesson, you will find five features:

- **THE OPENING SCRIPTURE VERSE.** You might encourage members of the group to memorize the verse each week. This may depend on the interest of your group, but even the newest in Christ need to begin committing the Word of God to memory, as it will hold them to righteousness when times of decision come in their lives.
- **THE NARRATIVE LESSON.** This lesson uses golf analogies to tie into Scriptural truths. Many non-golfers read our daily devotional, so the analogies are not necessary, nor are they normally meaningful only if you deeply understand golf. In some cases, you may wish to go to your Bible to provide more context for the Scriptures as they are presented in each lesson.
- **THE QUESTION BOXES.** These boxes may help individuals in your study reflect more personally on the lesson, but the questions can also open honest, rich discussion in your group setting. As you progress with your group, you'll acquire a sense of whether they are interested in open discussion, or whether they would simply desire to be taught in a straightforward style.
- **FOR FURTHER STUDY.** This final box always give the group something to beyond the boundaries of the brief study. They may do this before they come each week, or they may do the further study after you gather and discuss the main topic.
- **GAME ON!** These golf tips are provided to build a bridge for those who play the game. It might help your group get to know each other better if they work on these tips together when they head to the golf course.

Finally, the set of lessons concludes with a Review and Advance lesson. While you may emphasize life application of the study each time you meet, this lesson is intended to bring personal application to the forefront, so that each member of the group can assess their own position before God and move forward in their relationship with Him.

However you choose to use these studies, be it verbatim or as a loose guide, we pray that your group will be enriched and motivated by the studies. Should you have any questions or suggestions for us as we develop more of these studies, please give us a call at Links Players, 1-800-90-LINKS.

BECOMING A LINKS PLAYER

THE GOLF COURSE IS A PRETTY STRANGE PLACE TO GO LOOKING FOR GOD. The truth is, though, that God is infinite and able to meet us where we are. So people have met God through Jesus Christ in just about every imaginable venue, from the finest country clubs to the most despicable of the world's prisons. What matters is the readiness of your heart. When you're desperate for God, it is usually because everything else in the world has left you wanting something more. If you find yourself in that state today, God has quite an offer for you, made through His Son Jesus Christ with these simple words: "Follow Me."

In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." —Isaiah 25:9

When He said these words to His various people when He lived on earth, their responses varied. Some made excuses. Some considered what was involved and found it to be too much for them. But His disciples, those who chose to follow Him, set aside all they had tried before and followed. Was it easy? Often not. Was it what they expected? Once in a while. But was it what they desired? In their heart of hearts, yes. And the same holds true for the men and women in our time who have said, "Yes, I will follow."

If you have completed this study and reviewed the five points of the Links Player's personal mission as outlined on page 1, you have a good sense of what is involved in following Christ. You can't know everything, but you have enough information to "consider the cost," as Jesus said. If you now find yourself ready to commit to following Christ, here's what you do:

FIRST, if possible, make your commitment in the presence of someone who has already done so. This is not necessary, but from the moment of your surrender, you will have a partner in the faith, a person who can encourage and support you.

SECOND, begin to pray. This is a holy act, but it requires no special words or patterns. The Bible tells us that Jesus intercedes for us, carrying our prayers to the Father in heaven.

THIRD, give your sinful life to God. Tell Him that you are sorry for what you have done in the past, but that you know He can free you from the eternal consequences of that past.

FOURTH, tell God that you are thankful for the death of His Son, whose shed blood cleanses your sin.

FINALLY, let God know that you are ready for a new life, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to do things you have never done before, replacing sinful habits with righteous ones. Ask Him to guide you step-by-step, particularly in the next few days as you tell others about this important decision and commitment you have made.

Now that you have made this commitment to follow Christ, you are a Links Player. That's it.

But remember, too, that you are just a seedling. God has it in mind for you to grow. You can do this through important acts of faith, such as baptism and implementing your spiritual gifts. You will also want to form the habits of Bible reading, memorization and prayer, to learn more about God and to develop your communicative relationship with Him. If you're not sure how to go about all of this, your group leader can help answer your questions and point you to others who can help as well. Don't go it alone! God's plan includes rich fellowship among His people, for "as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

