

Links Players International Bible Study Series

THE LINKS PLAYERS COMMITMENT
Study 3 Network friends
together in Christ

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.

...there is a friend who stays closer than a brother.

—Proverbs 18:24

LESSON 1 THE BLESSING OF FRIENDS

YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO DO THE RESEARCH. Why do most people play golf? For the companionship, of course. They love meeting their friends at the golf course, where the world is set aside and the conversation and competitive fun take over.

COMMON BONDS

Think of some folks with whom you most enjoy playing golf. Is there a common trait or bond among them?

In his bestselling book, *The Friendship Factor*, Alan Loy McGinnis tells the story of two golfing friends, Richard and Stan, who had a standing Thursday afternoon appointment at the first tee. Stan tells what their time together was all about: "We say we do it for the exercise and the chance to be outdoors, but the real reason we get together—and we both know it—is to talk. We need to log in with each other at least once a week." Indeed, McGinnis adds that one of the friends survived a six-month layoff in part because of those Thursday "talks."

No doubt, friends are one of the great blessings of life (they sure beat enemies!).

But for the follower of Christ, friends aren't just everyday blessings—they are truly gifts from God. Scripture teaches that three things are eternal: God, God's Word, and people. No wonder, then, that He causes our hearts to be moved in each other's direction.

THE MOST FAMOUS OF THE BIBLE'S ACCOUNTS OF FRIENDSHIP IS THAT OF JONATHAN AND DAVID. Jonathan was the son of a king and heir to the throne. But God had rejected Jonathan's father, Saul, and his line. Jonathan was fully aware of this prophecy. He was equally aware that in his place, God had chosen David to take the throne as the next king. If ever there was reason for one man to suspect and despise another, Jonathan had such reason. And yet, without malice, he loved David.

THE WHOLE STORY

Read Scripture's account of David and Jonathan's friendship in 1 Samuel 19-20. Consider the evidences of Jonathan's personal sacrifice for David's sake.

Jonathan's friendship with David included not just the hanging-out-together kind of friendship we often see portrayed as the relaxed ideal. Nor was it only about communication, which we are told is the key to all good relationships. Jonathan's friendship extended far beyond this. Laying his own life on the line, he defended David against Saul's murderous intentions.

On the surface, it is hard to imagine what compelled Jonathan. When an ancient throne passed out of one family's hands and into the hands of another, it was not at all uncommon for the new king to slaughter the remaining males. Such kings didn't want the old family to reset its foothold. Jonathan, therefore, could have been setting his own death trap by providing safety and encouragement to David.

But Jonathan understood two things. First, he understood David. He saw David as a pure man, one who called on God for guidance and did not attempt to take matters into his own hands. Likewise, Jonathan understood God. He knew that God would care for him, even if God's plan didn't look to be in Jonathan's favor. Jonathan trusted God, so he could also trust his friend.

In a time of violent warring, Jonathan found room in his life to cultivate a powerful friendship with the man most likely to bring him down.

JONATHAN ACTUALLY NEVER FOUND OUT WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE TO BE DAVID'S MAN, RATHER THAN THE MAN TO LEAD ISRAEL. On the same day his father died, Jonathan and his brothers were killed in battle. David was called to the throne in one of the darkest hours of Israel's history.

But neither Saul's moods nor Jonathan's death were as dark as the day that Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price of friendship. He laid down His life for His friends, the very thing that He had taught was representative of the greatest love (John 15:13).

His disciples were distraught. Here was the man their own hearts were most drawn toward, and now they had lost Him to the deceit of their own leaders and the crushing headway of the Roman Empire. But when Jesus returned resurrected, He did far more than restore the disciples' opportunity to "spend time with their friend." He had made the way for them to be ultimate friends to one another.

You see, Jesus' death on the cross and the sacrificial outflow of His blood meant that men and women could have their sin forgiven. And when our past sins are forgiven, our coming temptations do not hold their former sway. Our pride is unnecessary, because we no longer have to "make our own way." Our selfishness is set aside, because Christ provides the things we really need. And our fear is assuaged, because we have the greatest hope—the hope of eternity—through Christ's death-defeating resurrection.

Now consider this: How much freer are you to love another as a true friend when pride, selfishness, and fear are pushed aside? Oh, how true it is that "if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed" (John 8:36)!

DEFINING TERMS

What comes to mind when you think of the term "networking"? Is it too clinical or too much like business for followers of Christ?

WITH THESE DEEP COMMITMENTS OF FRIENDSHIP IN MIND, THEN, WE BEGIN OUR STUDY OF THE THIRD PRINCIPLE OF THE LINKS PLAYERS MISSION: NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST.

As a business concept, networking has guided the practice of many companies and business people for many years

now. The idea there is to "work your contacts" for maximum impact in sales or contracts—the master networker ideally wants one contact to lead to another and then to another.

But as followers of Christ, our own approach must be much more personal than that. We must first look at people with love, as Jesus did with the rich young man (John 17:21). Then, guided by such love, we must consider what is best for others. Finally, we must build friendships for God's sake—to fortify His kingdom. In biblical terms, this means we must be mercy givers, evangelists, hosts, and servants. That's the difference between networking friends in Christ and simply networking.

But to be fair, let us be ignited by the thinking of one modern business leader who seems to understand the Christian ideal better than a lot of folks who call themselves Christians. It is Yahoo!'s Tim Sanders, who advocates making yourself a "lovecat"—that is, someone who gives away knowledge instead of hiding it, shares networks instead of guarding them, and shows compassion even when all the world is playing competitively around you.

That sounds a lot like Jonathan. And a lot more like Jesus.

GAME ON! To keep your swing smooth throughout, you will do well to start with a clean one-piece takeaway, your arms and wrists pulling away from the ball together. "Low and slow" going away can eliminate a lot of jerky motion as your swing progresses.

"Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me." —Revelation 3:20

LESSON 2 THE CLOSEST FRIEND

WHEN WE ARE YOUNG, WE ARE NOT TYPICALLY HESITANT TO NAME OUR BEST FRIEND. Something within us almost compels us to weed out the rest and select the "best."

We may call another our best friend because they most enjoy what we enjoy. Or they know our gut-wrenches and our goals. Or they laugh with us—at the very same things! Or they inspire us with challenges and encouragement.

As we grow older, however, diplomacy kicks in. We begin to understand that if we select just one, we are "excluding" others. Some who are less-than-best might turn to jealousy, and everyone knows what a horrible trap that can be. So we cluster our friends in circles we call "clubs" or "groups" or "foursomes." And we profess to enjoy everyone's company equally.

Gladly, however, we are permitted two indulgences that set aside this grouping.

The first is our spouse. No man can be faulted for calling his wife his best friend, and no woman for call her husband the same. Others who hear us say this may covet our relationship as one they would desire in their own marriage, but they are not jealous for our affections over and above what we give to our spouse.

But the second indulgence is far greater still. It is to call Christ our friend. Admittedly, in this regard it is easy to be misunderstood, for so many people know Christ only as the object of religious attention. The distant man of history. The figure on the crucifix. And yet here too, when our acquaintances perceive our relationship with Christ to be personal, as it would be with a close friend, they are moved to wonder and often—again—to covet.

EVEN NOW, YOU MAY STRUGGLE TO GRASP SUCH A CONCEPT OF JESUS. This may be especially true if you have learned to view Him at a distance as the untouchable God. It may be truer still if it has been far too long (if ever) since you have read one of the Gospels of the New Testament for yourself—because in them we find the real Jesus, who walked and talked with common men and women. One of those men, John, so greatly felt Jesus' personal affections, that he nicknamed himself "the disciple Jesus loved." Doubtless, Jesus loved all His disciples. But John recognized those eyes to be open toward him, those words to be spoken to him, those ears to hear him, that touch to minister to him.

You may also struggle with the idea of friendship with Christ if you have rarely or never experienced a deep friendship. It happens—more often than we admit—that we grow into and through our adulthood without ever really knowing another as friend, without ever really being known.

In the 1920s, a writer named Leslie Weatherhead made some of the same observations. He saw that men and women—even those who called themselves *Christians*—lacked a personal friendship with Christ, a friendship that would allow them to talk openly with Him, perfectly aware of His present attention. Weatherhead knew, too, that another obstacle kept people from taking Christ as a friend: they thought it esoteric, even weird. "Isn't it only so much spiritualizing to consider Jesus in such a

DEGREES OF FRIENDSHIP

How do you categorize your friends? Do you dare to say that some are closer to you than others? What makes them so?

JESUS AS FRIEND?

Have you ever thought of Jesus Christ as a friend? What has enabled or disabled this thought in your mind?

way?" they asked. But Weatherhead said no, this was not about mysticism or conjuration. This friendship was real. Read his words:

I have come home from some meetings thoroughly tired and disappointed and disillusioned. I have settled down in an armchair with bitterness in my veins instead of blood. There was a desire to write a letter calculated to crush one's opponent, and phrases which would silence him thronged on to the threshold of the mind. I was too

STOP AND THINK

Meditate for a few minutes on what it would be like to have Jesus show up in the middle of your day—at home, at work, with your family, among your friends. Is this a vision that intimidates you or encourages you?

tired to pray, too tired to stir up any desire to pray, and then I tried an experiment. I relaxed the body and relaxed the mind, left, as it were, the door of the mind ajar. There was very little more than a vague longing for the coming of the Friend, that Friend who understands, who understands our worst moments without losing belief in our best. And then something happened. The peace which is indescribable flooded the whole spirit; a hush which is ineffable quieted the mind. I have never seen a vision, I have never heard a voice, but I have felt that the last thing I wanted to do was to write the letter, and the last

words I wanted to use were those which would have brought the pride of an opponent down to the dust. And there is only one explanation of such an experience. God's greatest gift to men was given and accepted. The Friend *came*.

You see, we all know that the best friendships are not just dreamy; they are practical. The same is true with Christ. Sentiment does not go to a cross. Emotion does not lay down its life. But rock-solid friendship—the kind that is utterly practical—does what must be done, from hushing an argumentative spirit to shedding blood for our sins.

THE GREAT QUESTION, THEN, IS HOW TO CULTIVATE SUCH A VIEW OF CHRIST, HOW TO INITIATE SUCH A FRIENDSHIP. In the beginning, we must come with confession and humility. This may seem backwards, for we would rarely think to build an earthly friendship by admitting all our faults. But this is friendship with the only One who can forgive these faults completely. Together, you and He agree as to your sins, and then He says, "My blood has covered all that. Now we can get down to business." He is a friend bent on just such a restoration. And we must be bent on receiving it. So says Weatherhead: "If a man offers me a thousand pounds I do not knock him down, I do not have to struggle to get it. I take it and go home before he changes his mind." Christ will not change His mind; He still awaits your answer to His knock of friendship.

We continue in this friendship by increasing the regularity of our contact with Him. The quickest inference we make when another tells us they have a "friend" is that this is someone with whom the speaker spends much time. So what of us and our friendship with Christ? Do we set aside daily appointments for Him—times of prayer and the reading of those Gospels? We want our Friend to know us; let us be sure that we show that we want to know Him too.

Finally, we must remember that in a practical friendship, we will be called on to assist our friends, to do what they ask. And if we truly love them, we are nearly always eager to do this. Just as we request things of Jesus, He asks things of us. Indeed, He told His friends, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Our friendship with Jesus improves immensely when we take Him at His word and obey His instruction.

GAME ON! Here is an odd bit of golf physics for your approach shots: The club's descent dictates the ball's ascent. Hitting down on the ball, you will cause the ball to take a higher flight on its path to the target.

...Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body.

—Ephesians 5:23b

LESSON 3 THE BODY OF CHRIST Christ as our head

IN LEARNING TO PLAY GOLF, YOUR PROFESSIONAL WILL START BY GIVING YOU THE TWO KEYS TO BUILDING A SWING. That is, he or she will lay the foundation for everything else to come. These keys are a proper grip and a proper stance. How you hold the club and how you set your body make all the difference. But here is the curiosity: the grip and the stance, put together to form the basis of a good swing, seem to have little to do with one another. They are separate but bound all at once.

THE FUNDAMENTALS

Did you learn to play golf with attention to the grip and stance first? How long has it been since you revisited these basics?

The same may be true with the foundation we have so far established in regards to networking friends in Christ. In fact, we have hardly addressed the aspect of networking at all. Instead, we have spoken of the blessing of friendships and of our personal friendship with Christ.

On the surface, it would seem that these two approaches could exist just fine without one another. *Why can't I just cultivate my relationship with Christ and let others go their own way? And if I'm loving others, won't Christ be honored—whether or not I find time for Him?*

And what if we are doing an excellent job of building both? Don't we then have to know how to network—how to bring the friends to Christ?

As always, the Bible has good answers for good questions like these. For one, God is more balanced than the average person gives Him credit for. Yes, we are made to worship Him and to be spiritual beings. But we are also His creation, living in His creation, and we are meant to enjoy what He has given us. So earthly friends do not keep us from Christ, and we do not form a friendship with Him to the exclusion of others. By understanding both, we accomplish the goal of contributing to Christ's kingdom. The apostle Paul said it like this: "For although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win more people...I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19,22).

IT IS TRUE, HOWEVER, THAT YOU WILL NOT FIND THE TERM "NETWORKING" IN SCRIPTURE. When the Bible speaks of bringing men and women together in Christ, it calls them a body. Whereas a network is an organizational structure, a body is an organic one. Its components live and breathe. And we find just such a picture in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. We will allow that picture to guide us as we continue with this lesson and the next.

CROSSOVER THINKING

When you consider the term "networking" in the concept of business, what comes to mind? Can these ideas be reasonably applied to the body of Christ?

To begin, we would do well to remember our own biology. The brain is the control center of the human body. Chop off our heads, and we are done for! The brain advises and often dictates the operation of the other parts of the body. Should your hand touch something excruciatingly hot, via your nervous system your brain would send signals of pain, essentially "advising" you to remove your hand now! Do you have to remove your hand? Actually, no. Unless, of course, you plan to use your hand again in the way that it was designed to be used.

In five different references in three different letters, Paul referred to Christ as the head. To the Corinthians, he wrote that "Christ is the head of every man." To the Ephesians, he noted that God's

plan is to "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (NIV). Later, also in writing to the Ephesians, he added that we grow in every way "into Him who is the head—Christ," and that "Christ is head of the church." Finally, Paul told the Colossians that Christ is "the head over every power and authority." What a wide range of application for Christ's headship—over all people as they grow, over the church (the body), and over all leaders.

We must recognize that any time we are introducing people into the body of Christ, or any time we are interacting with others in the body of Christ, that Christ is not just a label, but the head. He advises and dictates the members of His body.

THIS IS ONE OF THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE WE CAN INCREASE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE BY CONSIDERING WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW TO BE TRUE ABOUT "HEADS." For we are all familiar with the use of that term in identifying leaders of corporations or governments. And what do we know about such leaders?

A head is one who takes charge. Good leaders know that they do not lead organizations as much as they lead people. So they develop relationships with those who work with them and for them. Then they administer their authority with tact and dignity.

IN THE LEAD

Would you add anything to these three descriptions of a company leader or "head"?

A head is the one who takes responsibility. A qualified leader accepts the fullness of responsibility, often for the actions of others as well as for his or her own actions.

A head is one who sets and guides goals. Such a leader conveys organizational values and operational principles and assures that throughout the company those values and principles are carried out.

In His oversight of His body, Christ demonstrates this kind of headship.

He takes charge. When Jesus came to Earth, He developed personal relationships with His disciples and challenged them accordingly. He taught by questions as much as by directives. He was gentle normally, but firm when necessary.

He takes responsibility. Needing a reminder of their place in Christ, many people turn to Romans 5:8: "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!" In this way, Christ took responsibility not only for the mission God had given Him, but also for the sinful errors of His people.

He sets and guides goals. We noted in the last lesson that those who love Christ obey His commandments. Such instructions are Christ's goals for His followers. We can encounter the completeness of these goals by regular Scripture reading. Through discipline, Christ also keeps us on course for those goals: "My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly, or faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and punishes every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6).

As we begin to network our friends in Christ, we want to be diligent in presenting the complete picture of how Christ leads us. Then we can function as a healthy body beneath Him.

GAME ON! When TV's analysts go "slow-mo" and "close-up" on a player's swing, their comments are often geared for the most experienced players. Keep those end goals in mind if you wish, but in the meantime keep working on the basics your pro has given you.

For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. —1 Corinthians 12:12

LESSON 4 THE BODY OF CHRIST The gifts we are given

OH, HOW WE LOVE A SCRAMBLE! Each player firing away with interest pointed only toward the biggest result: a long drive, a close-in approach, a holed putt. And if one misses wildly, the others are there to pick up that one.

Men and women mix well in a scramble. So do high-handicappers and low. Big hitters and delicate short gamers. It's a game that allows all to contribute, often in surprising ways.

TELLING STORIES

Enjoy a memory for a moment. When was a time you or a friend "came up big" in helping your team in a scramble event?

Of all golf's analogies, the scramble is among the best, relating so very closely to the body of Christ. For in the body of Christ, all are given gifts by the Father to use in service to others. It is into just this body that we should seek to advance in our walk with Christ. And it is into this body that we should seek to bring others as they grow in their faith as well.

PERHAPS IT WOULD BE WISE TO START BY DEFINING TERMS. What is the body of Christ, and how does it relate to His church? We learned from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that "Christ is the head of the church, His body" (Ephesians 5:23b, NIV). The body of Christ and His church are the same thing.

But the use of the term *body* helps us to clarify more specifically what the true church of Christ is and is not. Too often in our time, we have come to think of church either as a place ("I'm headed down to the church for the meeting") or an event ("We'll be going to church in the morning"). Neither of these definitions adheres to the New Testament picture of the church.

Equally inaccurate is the idea of the church as a formal organization. By nature, when a group of people gathers and governs as the church does, organization will be required. But when the Spirit of Christ established the church at Pentecost (in Acts 2), He was not looking to create just another earthly structure of men and women.

STOP AND THINK

In what ways can the local church benefit from an understanding of organization? In what ways must the local church fight to retain its Spirit-driven integrity?

The closest idea of what God was seeking to establish when the church began is that of a living organism. Hence, when the Spirit inspired Paul's words to the Corinthians, the apostle spoke of a body, a living form.

This is a critical bit of understanding if you are seeking a local church to attend as a follower of Christ, which can be a difficult activity for a new believer, or one new to an area. A church with good programs and overall structure is comfortable, yes. But be sure that the church is alive in its relationship with God, God's Word and among its members. If the members are "concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24), that is a good sign that the church is functioning as a healthy body.

But the concept of Christ's church as a body is important, no matter which local church we may attend. For whether we are interacting as a group of believers gathered for Sunday worship, a smaller group coming together for Bible study, two or three meeting for prayer, or a team doing outreach or benevolence in Jesus' name, we want to function according to His will. And His will is to display a living and active body, where each "part" contributes according to the gifts and measure of faith dispensed to each one by the Holy Spirit.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN ONE SENSE IS THAT OUR NETWORKS SHOULD NEVER BE SIMPLY LISTS OF "CONTACTS," NAMES AND NUMBERS THAT WE COLLECT LIKE SOUVENIRS. Rather, we want to see each brother and sister in Christ as one who contributes to us and one to whom we can contribute. Frankly, there is a lot of dignity wrapped up in that idea!

Additionally, we want to be sure that every new believer receives this understanding, as well as the training in spiritual gifts that accompanies it. Every man and woman should grow in at least three areas:

- (1) their faith in Christ, giving Him more and more of their individual lives
- (2) their work in Christ, gaining from the practice of prayer and Scripture reading
- (3) their work in Christ's name, developing and using the gifts that God has given them

In this way, our "Christian network" looks far more like a net than a list. What Christ wants for us is to be all tangled up together, where we can't help but support and encourage one another.

THE WORD ON THE GIFTS

To find the complete lists of the Spirit's gifts in Scripture, read Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and Ephesians 4:11.

NOW HOW ABOUT THOSE GIFTS? While there is some discussion among church leaders as to the present-day outworking of one or two of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, there is too much common ground to miss the big picture here. From Paul's letters, we gather that the Spirit's gifts planted in Christ's followers surely include these: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, mercy, wisdom,

knowledge, faith, evangelism, and pastoring. That's quite a list! And yet each of those gifts is made available in the body of Christ, as the Spirit wills.

If you spend time reading your way through 1 Corinthians 12, you will find that Paul was adamant about the interworking of the body's parts: "So the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' nor again the head to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, all the more, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary." (1 Corinthians 12:21,22).

To network in the body of Christ is not to bring people into an organization, or even into contact with a new set of friends. To network in the body of Christ is to allow people to serve one another and to serve together with complementary gifts as they reach out to the world.

(If spiritual gifts are a new teaching for you and you would like to further investigate spiritual gifts, several inventories are available. You will also find a list compiled by Links Letter editor Jeff Hopper at www.linksplayers.com.)

But it is likely that you have some knowledge of spiritual gifts, even with a good idea of what gift(s) have been given to you by the Holy Spirit. Make it your next mission to find complimentary partners in ministry, others who have gifts that are not so strong in you. Then you may work together to the fullest capacity of a living organism.

Finally, if you are already united in ministry, remember to bring new believers into the fullness of your "network," training and encouraging them in their gifts, so that they may minister as well.

GAME ON! If you decide to spend the money on a new driver to improve your distance, be sure to set aside an extra amount for a lesson from your local pro, who can help you maximize the equipment you have purchased.

For you can all prophesy one by one, so that everyone may learn and everyone may be encouraged...God is not a God of disorder but of peace. —1 Corinthians 14:31,33

LESSON 5 THE BODY OF CHRIST Balance and submission

IT IS NOT AT ALL EASY TO LEARN TO PLAY GOLF WELL. Most people's desire is not that strong. In fact, only about ten percent of golfers in the United States keep their handicap index with an established golf organization.

Learning to play golf well requires time and money, both marks of commitment. There are no guarantees, of course, but the golfer who spends the money for proper training and the time needed to develop good habits will almost certainly improve.

But one more thing is required as well: submission. That's right. If you are going to improve at golf—as with nearly all skilled endeavors—you will need to place yourself under the tutelage of an authority. In this case, that person is nearly always a teaching professional.

When you are taking lessons, you have two choices. You can do what the teacher says, practicing all that you have been taught. Or you can ignore that teacher and go your own way. Obviously, if you are forking over the money for private lessons, you will be more inclined to follow the teacher's lead. But the choice is still yours. Submit to the instruction and its requisite follow-up practice, and your chances of improving are excellent. Reject the instruction and, well, who knows?

IT ISN'T THAT SUBMISSION GETS A BAD RAP IN TODAY'S CULTURE. It's more that it gets no rap at all. You hear about leadership almost everywhere you go. "Followership," almost nowhere.

And yet, for any organization to function well, leaders must lead and followers must follow. The leaders may change—to fit a special project or a new phase in the organization—but they will always be there. And when those who shall follow do so with vigor, much can be accomplished.

Our own time is certainly not the first to forsake the need for "followership." In the Old Testament book of Judges, time after time God established leaders to direct His people according to the instruction that He had given them. And yet as each leader died, the people returned to "evil in the eyes of the Lord." The strain of sin that runs through us yearns to make us "all leaders, all the time."

One of the greatest lessons God has in store for us, however, is the lesson of submission. This begins with the *submission to Him* we call obedience. In order to do this most completely, we must read and honor His Word as it is laid out to us in the Bible. We must live according to His principles.

It also involves *submission to governing authorities*. Sometimes we do this most willingly, because we recognize, for instance, that a traffic light keeps us from accidents. We submit to red. Interestingly, it can often be easier to submit to these "invisible" entities than to those right in front of us.

Finally, we must *submit to other leaders as God establishes them* in our lives. Initially, if we are raised in the faith, this is to begin with our parents. That can be hard enough, in our know-it-all youths. But as we grow through stages of life, others gain positions of authority: teachers and employers,

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

How did you get started playing golf? Was it a serious effort right from the beginning? Or have you always been more of a recreational player?

FIRST IMPRESSION

What does the word "submission" mean in your mind? What are some examples of how you willingly submit and intentionally resist submission in your typical day?

mainly. Still, society allows us to escape their authority in proper ways—graduating from our studies, building our own business (what we call, ironically, "being our own boss").

GODLY EXAMPLES

Identify men and women you know who provide Godly examples of leadership that includes submission to Christ and His body.

The body of Christ is based on an entirely different concept. After our submission to Christ, we grow in the body according to mutual authority. That is, some are gifted by the Holy Spirit to be administrators or pastors. It is their normal role to lead others. And yet, they learn to step aside and allow others to lead as God's work calls for it.

One gifted with mercy, for instance, may be the leader in a mission to the needy of the streets. One given the gift of service may lead when it comes time to clean up after a special event. Then even the usual leaders must follow.

Through balance and mutual submission, the body of Christ grows together.

SIMILARLY, THE BODY OF CHRIST IS TO SHARE LEADERSHIP WHEN IT MEETS IN ITS LOCAL FORMS FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP. Look at 1 Corinthians 14: 26, a most surprising verse in today's pastor-dominant church culture: "How is it then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, another language, or an interpretation."

Often, we can be reluctant to take roles in public worship—or give them out—for fear that we are not "qualified." We establish earthly experiences (seminary training or longevity, for example) as the chief criteria for such leadership. But Scripture shows us again and again that it is God who ordains and the Holy Spirit who equips. A brand-new believer is just as capable of sharing a meaningful psalm or a bit of biblical wisdom as an old hand. And challenging new believers to be involved in this way will draw them into the *life* of the body.

FINALLY, WE MUST NOT OVERLOOK THE NEED FOR OVERSEERS AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE, BOTH ESTABLISHED IN PAUL'S WRITINGS TO THE EARLY CHURCH. Those who aspire to be overseers, or elders, are called to a high set of standards, standards that can only be achieved through surrender to the Holy Spirit's training: "...above reproach, a husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an able teacher, not addicted to wine, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy—one who manages his household competently, having his children under control with all dignity" (1 Timothy 3:2-4).

Just like God, isn't it, to use such a high set of standards for submission in order to build His leaders? *Every believer* should be moving in the direction of eldership, because the qualities are certainly godly in nature. And yet *no believer* will ever attain the fullness of this kind of leadership on earth, for our sin resides deeply.

DIGGING DEEPER

To gain an understanding of how differences among believers are to be handled in Christ's body, read Romans 14:1-15:13.

Therefore, we must always make room in the body of Christ for accountability, wherein we submit ourselves to one another's oversight, one another's admonition, and one another's encouragement.

Healthy organisms are never content only to *survive*. They desire to *thrive*. This is accomplished in Christ's body when believers, in love and honor for one another, push each other to the next level of individual growth before God.

GAME ON! Many older courses, or those lightly endowed, still feature funky tee boxes, with dips and swells caused by years of weathering. Take a few moments to find a level spot to tee off from—it's the only time you get to choose your lie.

Be hospitable to one another without complaining.

—1 Peter 4:9

LESSON 6 THE FRUIT OF HOSPITALITY

THE REASONS PEOPLE STEER CLEAR OF GOLF ARE NUMEROUS. They still associate golfers with plus-fours and plaid. They tried it once and sent the ball everywhere but upward. The costs are high, the people are snooty, it takes too long.

HOOKED

What attracted you to golf in the first place? What has made you stick with the game?

Of course, when you love the game, you have put all these hesitations to rest. You get out as often as you can.

People reject the Bible for a lot of reasons as well. They see it as contradictory rather than complementary when the accounts of the four gospels, for instance, don't align absolutely. They don't like the way it tells them what to do. Or they regard it as myth or fairy tale.

Sometimes, it's hard to blame them. The biblical accounts are not always clear, and when we start to mix in talk of angels, the narrative gets a bit fantastic.

But the Bible never makes apologies for itself. It states matters as God sees them, plans them, and wills them. And among the things God willed and created were angels, the mysterious messengers who show up in Scripture when we least expect them.

Such is the case with the line encouraging hospitality in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews:

"Do neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

No doubt, some of the stories you've heard about vanishing hitchhikers may be little more than so-called urban myths. But we can trust Scripture when it tells us that (1) angels are real, and (2) we don't always know when we are encountering them. And in this way, the Bible charges us to be hospitable people.

IF THAT MAKES YOU UNCOMFORTABLE, WE CAN TAKE A DIFFERENT TACK: THE PLAIN ONE. In listing a number of traits believers should display, Paul included this simple instruction to the Romans: "Pursue hospitality" (Romans 12:13). It doesn't get any simpler than that.

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU

Would you say you are open to or resistant to offering hospitality? To what degree were you aware that hospitality is taught in Scripture?

In this way the Bible and common sense—when it comes to bringing people together in what we call networks—align quite nicely. We are to reach out to others in warm, hospitable ways, whether we do that in our homes or not.

That's right. The first thing we must do in improving our hospitable nature is work our way past some of the falsehoods that may run through our thinking when it comes to welcoming others. Here are those obstacles:

- *Hospitality must happen in my house.* Many people hesitate to be hospitable because they do not see their home as "worthy" of welcoming others. This may be a false perception, but that really does not matter. Golfers certainly know that hospitality can happen outside of the home, for we have nearly all been invited to play at special courses with members or

friends. We can "entertain strangers" (as the New International Version says in its translation of Hebrews 13:2) at places outside our homes: restaurants, golf courses, movie theaters, churches, and more. Hospitality is more about words and smiles than about venues and tea trays. "Won't you join us?" is the telltale question of a man or woman with hospitality in their heart.

LEAVING THE MYTHS BEHIND

Have you fallen into the thinking of one or more of the myths about hospitality? If so, how might you break out of this thinking?

- *Hospitality requires too much time and money.* Consider the older man or woman who says to the child, "Sit right here with me," while tapping the empty spot on the bench. This is hospitality requiring no money and a little bit of time. Yes, there will be times when hospitality requires more of us. Yes,

there will be those who through their generosity outshine the rest of us, according to the gift the Holy Spirit gives them. These are not our concern. We can all learn to turn our attentions toward others, which is the essence of hospitality.

- *Hospitality should be given to those who will appreciate it.* Jesus spoke of giving to those who cannot or would not pay us back. You might call this a "Jesus loan." Hospitality should be given in the same way, not only to those who will pay us back or duly appreciate what we have given them. Their response is a matter of the heart between *them* and God. Your hospitable action is a matter of the heart between *you* and God. Start with *you*; let God finish with *them*.

When it comes to hospitality, you may need a complete change of perspective and attitude. Why not ask God right now to do that for you? To change your heart and mind and even your countenance when it comes to hospitality?

NOW WE KNOW THE BIBLE'S VIEW OF HOSPITALITY—HOW BASIC AND YET HOW IMPORTANT IT IS. But there is nothing wrong with being motivated by some reward. What are the fruits of hospitality? Knowing these may inspire us all the more to do what Christ asks of us.

First, *practicing hospitality improves our relationship with God.* Remember, our intimacy with God is greatly dependent on our obedience to Him. This is how we show Him that we love Him and that we appreciate what He has done in our lives. God instructs us to practice hospitality; when we do so, we are obeying Him out of our love for Him.

Second, *practicing hospitality demonstrates God's love for others.* We have already seen that hospitality according to God is offered without consideration of a person's background or ability to repay the kindness. This is how God loves us, and this is how He pushes us to reach out to others. When we do that with authenticity (as opposed to showmanship), we are showing them that Christ is in us. We have the privileged reward of being Christ's ambassadors.

Finally, *practicing hospitality produces an unexpected return.* We began by considering the possibility of entertaining angels. Of course, that would be a most wonderful unexpected return! But even if we never entertain angels, in our hospitality we are welcoming those God has made, each one uniquely created and gifted by Him. That means these people all have something to offer us in return. By practicing hospitality, we are able to partake of God's creation.

GAME ON! Always plan for a proper warm-up on the range before your round if you can. But if you're pressed for time, make "slow and easy" your main swing thought as you play the first few holes—you'll overcome the tendency to "kick it into gear" too early.

For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household...

—1 Peter 4:17

LESSON 7 A HEALTHY BODY

THOSE WHO CARE FOR OUR GOLF COURSES, THE SUPERINTENDENTS, KNOW THE SIGNS OF HEALTH ON THEIR TEES, FAIRWAY, AND GREENS.

They also know that health is not achieved in one season or another. For a golf course to be at its most healthy during prime golf season, a superintendent and his or her staff must care for the course year round.

GREEN AND PRISTINE

Have you ever played a course in impeccable shape? What was it like compared to your usual round?

This care is done through the application of fertilizers and herbicides in due time. It is done with careful mowing and watering, according to annual and daily schedules, but also according to the changing weather from year-to-year and season-to-season.

Golf courses require a lot of work to keep them in tip-top shape.

WHEN WE EXAMINE THE BODY OF CHRIST, WE CAN REVIEW ITS HEALTH BY EXAMINING THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GIFTS IN EACH OF ITS MEMBERS. But we also must take a look at how those individual gifts are being employed together in the fellowship of believers that the Christ called "My church." The church of Christ is never just a collection of individuals. It is Christ's followers working together to advance Christ's kingdom. And the health of the church is measured by the health of that togetherness.

As you work to network men and women together under the headship of Christ, you will want to know how to look for, cultivate, and review these signs of health. So here they are:

1 **Mutual edification.** If the idea of *edification* is not clear in your mind, you may be aided by synonyms supplied by the dictionary: build, establish, inform, enlighten. Where the New International Version uses the term *edify*, other translations use the expression *build up*. The idea, then, is one of supporting one another with what we say and teach to one another: "So, then, we must pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another" (Romans 14:19).

In a healthy church, what is being spoken by the leaders and among the people:

- encourages
- challenges
- urges
- sparks biblical thinking
- rings of indisputable truth
- reeks of love

But in addition to edification, we cannot miss the concept of mutual activity ("...do what leads to...mutual edification." - Romans 14:19, NIV). The job of edification does not reside solely with the pastor or priest. Nor is this the task only of a group of elders, or of the Sunday school teachers, or of the men's groups leaders. In a healthy church, everyone is to be about the business of edification, of speaking the Bible's wise words into the lives of others.

2 **Relentless sharing and giving.** In the church founded by the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, the people "devoted themselves...to fellowship" (Acts 2:42). We see also that "they held everything in common...For there was not a needy person among them, because all who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as anyone had a need" (Acts 4:32,34-35).

It is easy to read a passage like this one and draw political conclusions or relegate its accounts to a point in history. It is easy to do this because it absolves us of personal responsibility. But we must be careful never to dismiss Scripture too lightly. It is always pointing us in God's direction. And in the case of the church, the body of Christ, one member is *never* left to suffer alone: "So if one member suffers, all members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 14:26a). An important sign of a healthy church is that people don't fall through the cracks. Their needs are attended to by the others, for the others are always on the lookout for those who have needs.

3 **Common joy.** In the same way that members of the body suffer together, they rejoice together as well: "...if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 14:26b). In Christ's healthy body, we aren't really allowed "private parties." Of course, organizational considerations may preclude us from inviting every person every time, but certainly whenever the local body meets together as a whole—however small or large that whole may be—the *hallelujahs* of rejoicing should abound as we tell with eager joy what God is doing in our lives.

4 **Powerful testimonies.** Healthy local fellowships provide time for that "telling with eager joy." We must guard against turning over the whole of the "up-front time" to the teacher or leader of the group, which we often do naturally because he or she is the most eloquent or the most studied. But listen to Paul's own account of his visit to the Corinthians: "When I came to you, brothers, announcing the testimony of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:1).

If we believe that God works as fully and as wonderfully in our time as He always has, we must give room for the accounts of this work, just as we give room for the historical accounts of His work as recorded in Scripture. This is done by allowing each man and each woman time to speak of God's great work in their lives. Is it any surprise that God's people are not speaking of God outside the church when we have never given them the opportunity to speak comfortably of Him inside the church?

5 **Confession, repentance, forgiveness and discipline.** Though this arena of health is large enough for us to review for several weeks, we can only touch on it here—but *do not neglect its importance!* The body of Christ is healthy when its members "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Beyond confession, we must challenge ourselves and challenge one another to repentance—a turning away from the sin in a new direction. According to Christ's example, we forgive the sinner, but we charge them to live righteously as they go forward: "'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus (to the adulteress). 'Go and from now on do not sin any more'" (John 8:11). In the end, however, if the sinner persists in his or her sin, discipline may need to be employed to restore the unrighteousness member to Christ and to His

body. All of these principles, then—confession, repentance, forgiveness, and discipline—promote the health of the church or Christian fellowship.

FOR FURTHER STUDY
To understand more about the Bible's perspective on truth and discipline, read the following passages: Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, and 1 Timothy 4:1-16.

GAME ON! Most of us talk to ourselves on the golf course from time to time. The trouble is, we let criticism dominate. To get back on track, feed yourself some encouragement, including one of your favorite "surefire" swing thoughts.

"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 THIRD 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 third aspect of being a Links Player?

2. Overall, how have these lessons changed your perspective on friendships, both inside and outside the fellowship of Christ?

3. How would you like to improve your friendship with Christ?

4. How will it change your fellowship to focus on Christ as the head of His body?

5. What spiritual gifts are needed to "complete your body"? (For example, do you have an abundance of administrators but few who exercise a special gift of faith?) How will more people with this gift be of benefit to your fellowship?

6. How does submission make leadership a different matter in the church than it is in the world?

7. How will you perceive and exercise hospitality differently in the future?

8. Assess the health of your church or fellowship according to principles of lesson 7.

Now let's get personal. What is one way that you can commit to networking your friends in Christ during 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 NETWORKING FRIENDS IN CHRIST.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 networking friends in Christ 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 new to the business of bringing friends together in Christ. That's when it is good to have a supportive 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 make new friends, introducing them to Christ and His church and growing together with them.

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).

