



KEEPING SCORE

As a result, we are no longer to be children...; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4:14-15, NASB)

THIS WEEK MARKS ONE YEAR FOR ME on staff with Links Players. I'm also celebrating my birthday.

How many years? Who's counting? Well, pretty much everybody. The Social Security Administration, the people who give discounts to those who have reached a certain age, and, I confess, even me. Primarily because shooting my age is now one stroke easier. (Hey, you've got to have dreams.)

It seems like we keep score of almost everything. Age, golf, how many people come to church, how many miles per gallon we get, and how many carbs we ingested at breakfast. We count so many things I can't count them all!

We do this willingly, especially as golfers. We even use our scores to create another score—our Index. And while we say our Indexes offer us playing equality, they also give one of us the chance to say to the other, "I'm better than you."

Aren't you glad we don't keep a spiritual score, or, perhaps worse, a spiritual Index? Some of you may say *no*, because you'd like to have a way to know that you are growing spiritually, and I get that. I worked for a while on trying to create a "spiritual door jamb" that people could stand up against and measure their spiritual growth, pencil mark by pencil mark.

We are encouraged to grow up, not just in today's passage but throughout Scripture. It's not recorded in the Bible, but I'm pretty sure Jesus invented the phrase, "Oh, grow up!" when dealing with the apostles. He has certainly needed to use it with me.

But these days I'm thinking less of keeping score than I used to, even on the golf course. I want to hit shots and enjoy them and miss shots and laugh at them. How will I know when I'm better? I'll know.

And how will I know I'm growing spiritually if I don't keep score? Could it be that not needing to keep score is its own indication that I'm growing up a little?

Opening questions: Markers

How do you know your golf game is at its best—by a number or some other measure? What markers of growth or success have you used in other arenas of your life? How accurate are these markers?

Growing to maturity

Read *Ephesians 4:11-16*. According to this passage, what means does God use to prepare God's people and mature them?

What characteristics mark those who are mature (vv. 13-15)?

How would you answer Lewis' question: "How will I know I'm growing spiritually if I don't keep score?"

Against the tide

Read *Matthew 24:9-14*. Verse 12 speaks of those whose hearts will grow cold when difficulty comes for those who believe. How does spiritual maturation prepare us to stand in increasingly tough times?
