

SHARING YOUR FAITH, PART 6

“Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:8, NASB)

WHEN THE US OPEN FIELD CAME TO OAKMONT THIS YEAR—especially those who had played the storied course before—they marveled at the openness of the place. “You can from the clubhouse see clear across the turnpike,” was a common observation. What was behind this transformation? The removal of thousands of trees. No one knows the exact count, but in the past 25 years, Oakmont removed as many as 15,000 trees, with half of those coming out since the last US Open there in 2007.

The purpose in all this was first to return the course to its original look, and the decision to do so was controversial enough that the earliest purging happened under secret cover of darkness. What has resulted, however, is a flourishing of the grasses that once grew thin under the shade of those trees. And now you know why your local course, too, may be considering a new tree-free look for its layout.

When it comes to flourishing, few people will argue with you, be they gardeners or stock traders. Everyone likes it when a plan comes to fruition!

But what about our faith? How healthy is that, and what is it producing?

If the purpose in pruning, as we read in John 15:2, is that the tree would be more fruitful, then God too is looking to make us increasingly productive as we walk out our life with and for him. So it is exciting to read of the good soil and the seed that fell there. It was productive, Jesus said, even producing a hundredfold!

We have cast the Lord’s parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils in the light of sharing our faith in Christ, but we must not forget that the real work of faith-building belongs to God himself. Look: “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

Our own scattering of the word (sharing our faith) is merely that—a single task in the process. Others will come and contribute their tasks. But the Lord himself will bring the great miracle, which is growth. All of which reminds us that evangelism without prayer that seeks the intervening hand of God is a feeble seed-casting at best. If you want to share those words with effect, let your efforts be fed with prayer.

Opening questions What one big design change would you make to the course you play most often? • Who is someone you know who seems to be spiritually productive in a way you are not?

READING Psalm 1:1-6; Mark 4:20; John 15:1-4

Fruitful efforts (Psalm 1)

The man depicted in Psalm 1 is said to be like a fruitful tree. What practices produce such a person? What promise is given to those who are righteous?

Fruitful production (Mark 4)

How does Jesus’ explanation of fruitfulness align with Psalm 1? What must happen in order for such fruitfulness to occur?

A fruitful location (John 15)

Where does the ability to be fruitful come from? If pruning produces fruitfulness, what do you think this looks like in a person’s life? How willing are you to be pruned in order to effectively reach others with the message of Christ?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2016 Links Players International. You will find an introductory video for this study at <https://youtu.be/zDKdx8WRJ0g>.