

MAGAZINE INSIGHTS 1: LEARNING AND GROWING

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18, NIV)

BEN MARTIN IS LIKE PLENTY OF GUYS ON THE PGA TOUR. That is, even while professing an active faith in Christ, he is far more golfer than theologian. There is no reason to take issue with that. We all have been gifted and placed by the Lord into the work and arena he deems best.

What we must all have, however, is an increasing recognition of who God is and how he plants himself in the midst of our lives.

When Martin was in college, his faith was, let's say, thin. It would have had a hard time weathering the storms Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7 when he painted the picture of two men who had built their houses alternately on rock and on sand. Martin said of this time in his life: "My faith never had much impact on how I lived my day-to-day life or my night life."

Martin's words should strike a familiar chord with nearly all of us. It is true that some, like Christ, grow from childhood "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." There is little interruption to the trajectory of their faith. But the more common experience includes what we might call "back burner seasons," when other matters take precedence over the pursuit of Jesus and our steady walk with him.

Actually, *steady walk* is an important bit of phrasing, because too many Old Testament stories are riddled with episodes of fading faith, especially in one's later years, and too many New Testament exhortations push us to "stand firm" and "overcome." There is a consistent scriptural call to keep close with Christ and pattern our steps after his.

In order to do this in the practical sense, we nearly always must first have our minds renewed by the Spirit of God (see Romans 12:2). This brings a transformation in the way we see this life set into the infinite landscape of eternity. It requires, as we find in today's passage, that we fix our eyes on what is unseen. Now if that isn't a riddle! What we can make of it is pretty straightforward, however. If we are to learn and to grow in our faith, we cannot do so by looking only to the material interests around us; we must look to Christ and to the life he has bought for us far beyond here.

Opening questions Is there a season in your life that you look back on as frivolous or even wasted? What did you learn from that season all the same?

READING Matthew 7:24-27; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Ephesians 6:12-18

Testing our foundations (Matthew 7)

Where does a firm foundation in Christ come from? How can this be improved in your life?

'Don't lose heart' (2 Corinthians 4)

What is the purpose of Paul's call to eternal perspective? What are ways that a proper view of eternity can have a positive effect on this present life?

Prepared to stand (Ephesians 6)

How does "armored readiness" equip you to stand against challenges to your faith? Which components of the armor of God need more attention in order for you to maintain a steady walk with Jesus?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2016 Links Players International. A seven-minute introductory video is available for this study at https://youtu.be/mMIPU_5Kt04