

THE OR SERIES 1: GOD OR NO GOD?

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1, NIV)

IF HAMLET HAD INSTEAD ASKED, "To golf or not to golf?," his question may not have been so fateful, but I'm not sure it would have been any less confounding.

The personal and financial cost of any hobby carries part of the answer. In this way, golf is no different. Are we willing to commit the time, effort, and money it takes to gain proficiency with a club in our hands?

But there's more to it than that. Our friend David Cook asked at the beginning of his beloved book, *Golf's Sacred Journey: Seven Days at the Links of Utopia*, "How can a game have such an effect on a man's soul?" Golf asks things of us that we would not otherwise put ourselves through. It tests our fortitude and our attitude. In the same round, we can experience desperation and delight. And the craziness of all that we have said so far is that we are speaking of a *game*.

For the follower of Jesus, the questions may be even greater still. We live in an upside-down kingdom, where the pursuit of one's pleasure is never our first priority. So do we play golf with a purpose? If we don't, we probably are not considering our participation as we should. But if we are playing to build and cultivate relationships, or we are working to find a space silent enough to think of the things that matter in life, we are on a better track.

In the broader world, one thing believers find as a difference between themselves and their friends is that these friends will often consider deep questions about something like golf but not about God in heaven. Yet whether to believe in God is the most important question in the universe. There are other questions attached to it, of course—can we prove God's existence, who is this God we believe in, and how are we to access him? But it centers around our belief in God.

King David wrote that the person who does not believe in God is foolish. More directly, he or she is a fool. That's not name-calling, but it is calling someone out. In the biblical sense, a foolish person is one without what we have come to call a moral compass. They make their own rules. Many people prefer this way of life, as in it they can call their own shots. Where foolishness enters the picture is that without belief, godless sinners are left to bear their own consequences. No Redeemer. No Savior. It is into this gap that we must speak, with the experience of our own salvation passed on to those who need to hear God's wisdom.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2017 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: https://youtu.be/_49PKZtHzuM

Opening questions To you, what is the biggest downside of playing golf? What is the biggest benefit? • What are some components of a life lived foolishly in your eyes?

READING Psalm 14:1-7, Isaiah 45:18-24, Acts 16:29-34

Marks of the foolish and the righteous (Psalm 14)
In David's psalm, what things differentiate the foolish from the righteous? Do you dare classify yourself in one of these categories?

God and salvation (Isaiah 45)
How does God establish himself as the one who saves in this passage? To what degree does your heart resonate with these words?

A changed household (Acts 16)
What was the jailer's question and how did Paul and Silas reply? What was the effect on the man and his family?
