

LINKS PLAYERS WOMEN

VOLUME I

FAIRWAYS OF FAITH

72 WOMEN'S GOLF DEVOTIONALS



Welcome to Links Players Women's Ministry. In this volume, you will find 72 devotionals written by the women of Links Players. These devotionals are shared with our global audience every Thursday. You can sign up to receive Links Players devotionals written by our team every weekday at www.LinksPlayers.com.

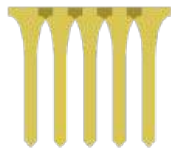
This collection of devotionals was compiled to provide women with free, faith-based golf devotionals, serving as a resource for Links Players Women's Fellowship. There are no specific group questions at the end of the devotionals because each group may have different questions they wish to explore.

You can simply print out these devotionals each week for your fellowship or email you attendees prior to your meeting time. We encourage group facilitators and leaders to review the material beforehand and develop discussion points related to each devotional. The Holy Spirit can guide you in tailoring these discussions for your specific fellowship.

At Links Players, we pray that these devotionals will draw you and your fellowship closer to the Lord, helping you understand His purposes for us as we navigate the fairways of life. May God bless and accompany you on this journey.

Love and Blessings in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Meredith Kirk
LPI Women's National Director



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The Importance of Context

Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then, after this, he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." (John 11:5-7, ESV)

The best golf instructors begin as disciples of other teachers. The golf swing is complex, and good teachers never stop learning.

As disciples of God's Word, having a set of tools to read and study the Bible in its original context assists us in continuing to learn. Brad Gray, Founder and Executive Director of Walking The Text, writes, "Remember, the Bible is a sophisticated piece of ancient literature, and it requires several contextual lenses to engage it well."

Brad has compiled six categories for interacting with the Bible in his e-book, "The #1 Mistake Most Everyone Makes Reading The Bible." Let's examine today's scripture passage through this framework.

Historical. The Bible writers often left out extra details that their audiences already knew, hence, why it's important for us to ask, "What was going on in the world, and why are certain events unfolding the way they described?"

Other questions: What time period are we dealing with? What is the historical setting? Lazarus' story occurs near the end of Jesus' three-year ministry. Jesus had left Judea because of a division between the Jews and the Pharisees, who wanted him dead.

Cultural. Who are the characters, and where are they from? What was good or hard for them? This category includes value systems (like honor and shame or Hellenism), tribal or agrarian societies, the Temple as the center of Jewish life, and Rabbinical teaching practices. This is much different than the culture we experience.

As the male in the family, Lazarus's illness has great consequences for Martha and Mary. Jesus's "staying two days longer" doesn't fit the community value system. After three days, a person was considered officially deceased. Curiously, Jesus came on the fourth day.

Geographical. Where does the story take place? What are the climate, geology, topography, accessibility to water and trade routes, and politics? Jesus was in the Jordan River when he heard about Lazarus. Bethany is nearly seventeen miles back up the Judean mountains near Jerusalem.

Visual. What does the place look like? Research photos or illustrations of the location of the story. Imagine what it would have been like to live there. Jesus and his disciples were in the wilderness – dry, hot, and dusty, but by the river. The road back up to Judea was harsh and dangerous.

Linguistic. The original languages matter, and they function much differently from the English language. This means every translation is an interpretation by the translator. We can trust the Bible, but we need to consider looking at multiple translations.

Literary. Literary addresses genre, design, W's (who, where, when, why), and placement. Look into the specific Hebrew and Greek words and their meanings. Lazarus' story is not a parable; it is a historical narrative. The placement of this story in John's Gospel is right before the plot to kill Jesus.

I hope you are encouraged and challenged to try contextually reading the Word. It might feel intimidating, but a little at a time will awaken more life in the Living Word.

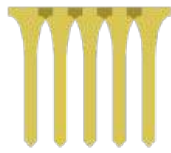
Prayer: Lord, help me open my eyes and heart to the depth of your Word.

—

Tracy Hanson

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Come As You Are

The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Revelation 22:17)

After spending twenty-five years as a golf instructor, I have accumulated numerous stories of how the Lord has spoken to me through the game of golf on the lesson tee. One recurring theme He has emphasized time and again is the apprehensions experienced by those who are new to the game. Nearly all new students, regardless of age, harbor some apprehension about their first golf lesson. Some worry they won't even manage to get the ball off the ground, while others become overly technical about getting everything exactly right.

I always reassure my first timers to simply come as they are. Bring whatever equipment you have, dress comfortably, and just show up. Often, I can sense the relief in their eyes when I assure them that the first golf lesson experience is easy and enjoyable and that before they know it, they'll grasp the fundamentals of the game.

I even have some of them start by playing just a hundred yards in with only four clubs before letting them tee off with a full bag. Becoming acquainted with anything in life requires taking small steps. The same principle applies to our faith and trust in Christ. Jesus doesn't expect us to know how to be a Christian when we first come to Him. Nor does He expect us to clean ourselves up or unload our own sinful baggage before approaching Him.

All He asks of us is to come! Revelation 22:17 states, "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."

We can come to Him at any time and in any circumstance, even in the midst of sin. He has seen us at our lowest and our highest. Whether we are tired, weary, thirsty in our faith, joyful, thankful, troubled, distressed, or grieving, Jesus simply says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

As you approach Him just as you are, He will gradually chip away at the flesh, revealing your new creation as a person over time. It unfolds much like a golf lesson—one swing at a time.

If you're hesitant about approaching the Lord, don't be. Listen to the proclamation of the Prophet Joel as he declares, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Joel 2:32)! That time is now, as we hear Jesus beckoning us in this generation, saying, "COME"!

And if there's still trembling in your knees due to fear and apprehension, remember that all have fallen short of the glory of God. Just like every golfer has shanked the ball, we have all been shankers!

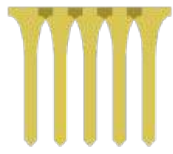
Yet, the Apostle Paul encourages us with these words, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). So come as you are, boldly before the throne of God, and experience His grace and mercy and allow it to flood your soul. He will guide and direct your every step (as our Master Instructor) when you simply come to Him. He has you in His grip. So come as you are.

Prayer: "Lord, we come to you!"

Meredith Kirk

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Paul, Timothy, And Barnabas

Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Most people find that they play better when they are playing with golfers more proficient than themselves. I love visualizing what I want to do on the golf course and being in the presence of smooth swings, crisp shots, and great timing in a golf swing. It elevates my game and helps me concentrate on what I desire to accomplish, not what I am trying to fix. Are you like that too?

I find the same principle at work in my walk with Christ. It is much easier for me to 'be holy' (set apart for God) when surrounded by people who know the Lord well and have a close relationship with him—people who know how to pray and are knowledgeable of God's word. A godly example in one's life is a precious gift.

Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Of course, the Lord Jesus is always our perfect example, but having someone with 'skin on' to shadow is very helpful. That person can represent our 'Paul,' the teacher and mentor to us.

If you don't have a 'Paul' in your life, take a moment to observe others around you whose walk with the Lord you admire. Pray and ask the Lord to show you whom he would place in your life for that role. They may already be in your Links Fellowship. Then boldly ask that person if they would mentor you.

We need a 'Timothy' in our lives as well. This person is one whom we are helping along in their journey of faith. Paul tells Timothy, his son in the faith, "...and the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." (2 Timothy 2:2)

It is a privilege to be used by God in another's life, to play a small part in that person's spiritual growth, and to watch that person learn to pray, grow in God's word, and minister to others. Be bold and ask God for someone you can come alongside and encourage in their faith.

And the third person we need in our lives is 'Barnabas.' In Acts 4, we learn that his real name was Joseph, but the apostles called him Barnabas, a son of encouragement. Do you have a Christian encourager in your life? Someone who is your cheerleader and holds you accountable? Someone who loves you enough to tell you the truth and get in your face if necessary?

In whose life are you the Barnabas, encouraging someone else in the Lord as David and Jonathan did for one another? Ecclesiastes 4 tells us that two are better than one...if either falls, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

Our walk with the Lord Jesus is individual. But each Christian is also part of the body of Christ. We need one another and have been given gifts to edify one another – to build each other up in the faith. Find that Paul, Timothy, and Barnabas for your walk. And allow God to use you as a Paul, Timothy, and Barnabas for others.

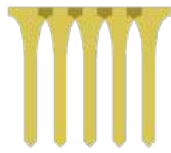
Prayer: Father God, I ask in the strong name of Jesus that you would direct me to those I need in my life to help me grow in you.

—

Cheryl Martin

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A Dominant Force

Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:30-33 NKJV

Scottie.

Like Arnie, Jack, Tiger, and Annika, the Scheffler factor is a dominant force. He took control of Augusta National over the last nine holes to win the 2024 Masters.

Scottie’s attitude, posture (presence), stride, and demeanor remain the same whether he makes a birdie or a bogie. He admits to feeling the nerves, but his resilience keeps his mind free of negative chatter.

I am drawn to Scottie’s humility and countenance. He is a good human being and loves Jesus.

While it’s okay to be enamored with the world’s number one male golfer, we are not to put him on a pedestal to idolize. Likewise, there are many characters in the Biblical narrative, both men and women, who are worth our attention—people whom God used in significant ways to change history.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of these people. We know this young Jewish teenager conceived the Son of God while still being a virgin. This is an important fact in her story, for sure, but it does not reflect all of the qualities that Mary brought to the kingdom of God.

The angel’s message to Mary included much more. She said yes to being an unwed mother in an honor and shame-culture. She said yes to the coming King who redefined kingship. It’s common to see spiritual truths in Mary’s response to the angel, but it also includes a political and subversive path.

Mary might have been surprised that she found favor from God, but she didn’t live in a vacuum of ignorance of her Jewish heritage or the stories of her ancestors, especially other women who said yes to God in surprising ways. She would have known the stories passed down from one generation to the next – Tamar’s defiance (Genesis 38), Rahab’s faith (Joshua 2), Ruth’s loyalty (Book of Ruth), and Bathsheba’s humility (2 Samuel 11-12).

We must not overlook Mary's defiance, faith, loyalty, and humility. She said yes to God and stayed true to her calling. She is one to learn from and emulate but not to idolize.

As a man of faith and gifted with golf talent, we can all learn something from Scottie. Regarding our journey with Jesus, may we grow in defiance, faith, loyalty, and humility. Learn from Mary and be a dominant force in our world today.

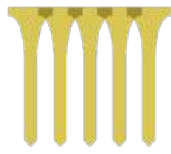
Prayer: Lord, thank you for the people we read about in your scriptures who encourage me today. Help me say yes to you just like Mary did.

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Walking in Wisdom

Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. Psalm 28:26 ESV

Teddy Scott is an Augusta National expert. Despite having already helped two PGA Tour pros win three Masters trophies between them, Teddy still walks and studies the course to learn more to help his player Scottie Scheffler during the tournament. Teddy walks in wisdom as a professional tour caddy.

To understand what it means to walk in wisdom, it's beneficial to excavate and mine this phrase from a Hebraic perspective.

In Jesus' first-century world, Jewish rabbis were teachers of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). These teachers weren't interested in passing around big ideas or new philosophies for the sake of debate. This was what the Greeks were known for...philosophy and acquiring knowledge to support their notion that "man is the measure of all things."

Jewish rabbis, Jesus included, had a different worldview. Kristi Mclelland says, "For the Jews, the Lord is the Lord of all, and all things orient to Him. A rabbi's teaching was crafted to show you how to halakh (walk) the halakha (way or path). A rabbi taught you how to walk out your life in the path or way of the Living God. It wasn't merely about what you thought but about how you lived. It wasn't what you knew – it was about how you walked the path of the Lord (Jesus and Women Bible Study).

Learning to walk in wisdom requires studying and learning Scripture and walking in fellowship with others. We don't want to contain information for conversation, merely debate, or to feel good, however. To be like Jesus, we are to take our knowledge and put it into action. James tells us, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead (James 2:26)."

Walking in wisdom means we orient our lives toward God and actively put into practice what we know and how God wants us to conduct our lives. Walking in wisdom is for our own heart's benefit and for the good of others too.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us to walk by the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). A few verses later, he states, "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (Galatians 5:26)." I believe we have continual room for improvement according to these two lists.

To the Ephesians, Paul urges all to walk (live) with humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, and maintaining unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-3). This doesn't mean we can't have different opinions from others, but how we love and care for one another despite our differences.

As humans, we fall prey to playing in the pool of selfishness, pride, and hardness of heart. We must return to Rabbi Jesus daily, sit under his teachings, and learn from him how to walk out our lives in the path or way of the Living God.

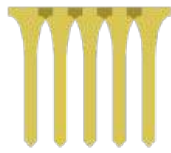
Prayer: Lord, Father, help me to learn from you so that I can walk in wisdom and the path you have for me.

—

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Augusta and Amen

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25, NIV)

Even casual sports fans talk about the annual Masters Tournament with deep reverence. Augusta National Golf Club is one of the few places in life that not only lives up to the hype but surpasses it. People often use church-like words to describe it.

The most famous stretch of holes, of course, is known as Amen Corner. Fans say there's something "spiritual" about the place. It's hailed as one of golf's great cathedrals. Holy ground.

Just ask the guy who tried to take a cup of sand from one of the bunkers a few years back and was hit with jail time and \$20,000 in expenses.

It truly is a tradition unlike any other.

As I sat in church on Sunday, thinking about the final round that was about to transpire and the course in full bloom, our worship leader led the congregation in the song "House of Miracles."

Come alive in the name of Jesus.
Come alive in the name of Jesus.
This is a house of miracles.
We bring everything to the feet of Jesus.
Everything in the name of Jesus
This is a house of miracles.

Earlier that morning, I'd shared news of our adoption with a woman who'd prayed for us at the altar last year. I still don't know her name, but we hugged and rejoiced over our toddler in the nursery.

It's the same altar I knelt at decades ago in college, praying for a husband.

Coming together in pursuit of the Lord's will has great power, as we see in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

The beauty of that famed former nursery in Augusta, Georgia, is amplified by the stillness and silence of thousands of people gathered in awestruck wonder. In that way, it reminds me of a great cathedral filled with grateful and broken hearts alike, searching for miracles.

How often do we step into a house of worship filled with the same anticipation that we'd feel walking into the gates of Augusta National?

Every Sunday, we gather in a house of miracles, surrounded by like-minded folks in the presence of a King.

Talk about sacred.

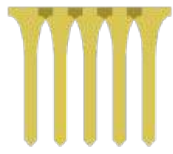
PRAYER: Father God, we thank you for beautiful places because that beauty reminds us of you. Forgive us of the times we treat the truly sacred as routine.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Breath

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath[a] enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:4-6, ESV)

Matthew Jordan stood with his eyes closed, slowly moving inhaled and exhaled past his mouth. Intentionally using his breath to settle his nerves and anxious feelings for his Sunday round at The Open on his home course Royal Liverpool.

From a neuroscience perspective, this slower breathing brings more oxygen to the body, allowing the heart and lungs to do the work they are designed to do. For Jordan, focusing on his breathing helped him focus on his tee shot.

We rarely think about our breathing because our bodies automatically breathe for us. Without breath, we don't exist. It is the start of the human story. "Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Genesis 2:7).

The Hebrew word for breath in our Ezekiel passage today is ruach. Ruach as spirit appeared when the LORD hovered over the waters as God began creating. Ruach can be a blast of wind of God's destruction (Job 4:9). Ruach (breath) is also the source of life that originates with God.

Babies come into the world breathing seamlessly using the diaphragm. As we grow and life happens, our coping strategies hijack this process leaving us stuck in shallow breathing. Silent chaos begins to ensue within our nervous systems.

Modern neuroscience confirms that re-learning to breathe from the diaphragm positively impacts our nervous systems and therefore strengthens other systems in our bodies at the same time. For elite athletes, slowing the breathing allows the brain to slow down, which helps the athlete be more focused, calm, and ready to perform at their full capability.

Self-awareness of the rhythm of our breath is spiritual too. Author K.J. Ramsey says, "Any moment that stress starts to sink you down the autonomic ladder (fright, flight, freeze), you can remember that the Breath who formed this world breathes within you." Sometimes all we might be able to do is say Lord on an inhale and help on an exhale. Attuning to our most basic function of breathing can remind us of our need for God.

The physiological benefits of slower, diaphragmatic breathing are managing stress and anxiety, increasing oxygen to the heart and brain, and better sleep. The spiritual benefits unite us with God – the creator and giver of life.

How are you breathing today?

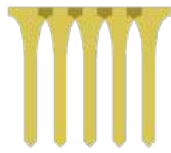
Prayer: Lord, help me connect to you through my breathing today.

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What Is That Smell?

But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. (2 Corinthians 2:14-15, NLT)

I find it interesting to hear TV commentators speak about the players on tour and describe their attitudes and actions on the course. There are many 'nice guys and women' playing the tours, but when I know a Christian is being discussed, I listen in more closely, for that player is representing his Savior.

Just as the tour players have a reputation on the course, so do we who call ourselves 'Jesus-followers.' Did you know that our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising to God? The sweet aroma rises like an offering of incense. Historically, the Romans burned incense during their victory processions as an offering to their gods. As we live out life in Christ's victory over sin and death, we spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere like a sweet perfume.

Never underestimate the power of your kindness, grace, and peace to others. You may entice someone to search for the Source.

What an honor but also what a great responsibility. Is our aroma Christ-like? Would it attract or repel non-believers? If we have a stinky attitude – prideful, short and sour tempered, selfish, angry, etc. – we must deal with it and ask for forgiveness. God is faithful and forgives us and cleanses us of all unrighteousness.

The hope we have in Jesus is a life-giving perfume to the lost. Never underestimate the power of your kindness, grace, and peace to others. You may entice someone to search for the Source. Even if they quite can't put their finger on it, others often notice something about you that makes you different.

1 Peter 2:9 tells us that those who follow Christ are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. Christians ARE truly different from those who are still in darkness. As King James puts it, we are "peculiar people" whose perfume pleases God.

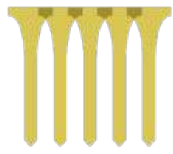
It is God's love others are attracted to, which could be the beginning step to opening their heart to Jesus. Who in your daily interaction needs to smell the aroma of Christ today? And possibly to receive an invitation to your Links fellowship?

Prayer: Father God, may my life be a fragrant offering to you today that gives off the sweet aroma of Jesus to others around me. Teach me how to make the most of every opportunity to show your love and to tell of the hope I have in you today.

Cheryl Martin

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When Good Doors Close

It's getting close to Cup season, which means that the fate of a handful of players will be up to a captain's discretion. Ask any Solheim Cup or Ryder Cup captain about the hardest part of the job, and many will say captain's picks. Not simply because it can make or break the legacy of a captain, but because it's hard to crush someone's spirit.

Whether it's on the playground field, in the dating world or on a job search, it's impossible to escape the feeling of being unwanted.

Everyone experiences rejection.

What often follows rejection is a period of sadness, frustration and then – more waiting.

In Lamentations, Jeremiah writes, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.'"(Lamentations 3:22-24, NIV)

We often look back in gladness (and relief!) at the seemingly perfect doors the Lord kept closed. One thing I've learned about the waiting period is to look for opportunities God lays at my feet that could not have been done had I not been in a period of waiting.

Let's say, for example, that I really wanted to cover a certain tournament and didn't get the assignment. What am I learning, who am I serving, what am I working toward during that week at home that I otherwise wouldn't have been able to do? How am I becoming better prepared for the next assignment?

The hard "no" of a rejection is often simply a "not yet." Because "the Lord is my portion," it's possible to be content while also still desperately seeking His best.

Rejection is a necessary part of life, but sometimes we can unnecessarily make those around us feel unwanted or unnoticed.

My singles pastor used to call a group of us "the holy huddle," and while he said it with a smile, I knew what he meant. We were deeply involved in the ministry, but when we all sat together during corporate worship, it didn't give off a very "inviting" vibe.

I regret that now. I wish we had spread out and made newcomers and those longing for connection feel more welcome more often. If I'm honest, I still struggle with that sometimes.

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” – Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

Whether it’s turning someone down for a second date, a second interview or the invitation to be a four-ball partner, compassion must be at the heart of all communication. We must share in heartbreak.

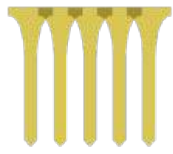
PRAYER: Father God, we’re so grateful that you know what’s best for us. Even when the pain of rejection stings our soul, we rejoice in the hope of what’s to come. Help us to treat others with the same kind of compassion we’d wish to receive when “no” or “not now” is the answer.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Four Things

Come, my children, and listen to me, and I will teach you to fear the LORD. Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous? Then keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies! Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. (Psalm 34:11-14 NLT)

I opened the back hatch to start unloading my car and paused to get a sense of the layout. The sky threatened thunderstorms, but I repeated, "This is Michigan where the weather can flip in a minute." My heart settled seeing the high school kids pulling carts out. Mick bounded up the steps ready to help set the tables where I wanted them. The five months of preparation for this one day was coming to fruition.

After getting my volunteers settled with their duties, I turned my attention to connecting with participants and the lady professionals who were the anchors for my annual pro-am fundraiser. There was nothing left to do except play golf and enjoy the day.

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As I pondered my feeling of awe, my thoughts turned to two things that King Solomon concludes about life: "Fear God and keep his commandments." This is to be our response not just when life works in our favor, but all the time.

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Four and half hours later, I walked around the room experiencing smiles and laughter. Joy was present and I felt a sense of awe. I do this event to benefit the non-profit, but the sponsors, friends, and pros were there to support me too. The day was perfect and God's provision for the work he has laid on my heart was evident.

When circumstances go our way, it's easy to exhibit healthy behaviors. But what about when life turns hard and is exhausting?

As I pondered my feeling of awe, my thoughts turned to two things that King Solomon concludes about life: "Fear God and keep his commandments." This is to be our response not just when life works in our favor, but all the time.

In the 34th Psalm, King David reveals four things that lead to fear (awe) of the Lord and help us keep his commandments.

Keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. Ouch! The words we speak have the power to bless or curse. The way we speak about or toward others, and what we say to ourselves reveals the state of our hearts.

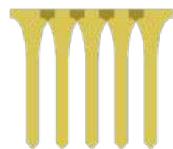
Turn away from evil. It is easy to fall prey to anger, jealousy, self-pity, pride, unforgiveness, bitterness, and more. We must practice putting on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bear with one another, and most of all put on love (Colossians 3:12-13 ESV).

Do good. Deal rightly and justly with others. Help others feel valued and cared for, including yourself.
Seek peace and pursue it. We are not to compromise values or morals for peace but pursuing peace might mean agreeing to disagree with another person. Gratitude is the doorway to joy and joy is a forerunner of peace.

Let us consider these four admonitions with honest reflection. They are the pillars to live a life that is long, prosperous, and rooted in Jesus. And a life-long process.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to pursue truth in our own lives and seek to fear you and follow your commandments. Help us bridle our tongues, turn away from evil, do good, and pursue peace.

Tracy Hansen
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Back To The Basics

*Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first.
(Revelation 2:5)*

Have you taken as many golf lessons as I have over the years? Whenever someone complimented me on the range or the course, my husband would say that he had a lot of money invested in my swing!

When my game would go south on me, I knew I had to return to the basics. I always took notes after a lesson and kept them in my golf bag for just this purpose. And no matter how far I grew in my knowledge of the game, the basics never changed. They were just what I needed to get back on track.

And so it is with our Christian walk, our relationship with the Lord Jesus whom we are following. Have you noticed that our flesh, our default mode, tends toward rebellion? If left unchecked, we will become estranged from the Lord and less and less like Him.

There is the story of the man with two dogs, brothers from the same litter, one brown and the other red. He was asked which dog was the stronger, and his answer was, "The one I feed, of course."

Are you feeding the flesh, your natural man? Or are you feeding the Spirit? Galatians 5:16 says, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." To live by the Spirit, we have to get back to the basics of our faith: prayer (including confession), the Word, and worship.

We need to remember how it was when we first came to the Lord...when our faith was fresh and thrilling, and we couldn't get enough of the Lord and His word - when everything seemed a miracle, and we were growing by leaps and bounds.

And then we need to repent, literally change our mind and our direction; instead of walking away from the basics, we need to return to them and jump right back into a daily quiet time with the Lord, praying, praising with time in the Bible.

This is a great time of year to assess our walk with the Lord. Are you closer to the Lord than you were in January? Or have you fallen? Commit to change your direction and return to the basics. For the joy set before you and the pleasure, it will bring our Lord.

“To progress, we need to begin again.” Martin Luther

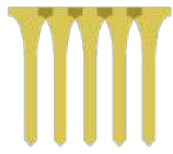
Prayer: Father God, draw me back to a closer walk with You. Please help me to put you first in all things. In the strong Name of Jesus. Amen

—

Cheryl Martin

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O Little Town of Bethlehem

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. Luke 2:6-7 NIV

The Nike swoosh wobbled on edge. The announcers and viewers froze in disbelief until the ball slowly toppled into the cup. And then the world went wild. Tiger's famous chip on hole 16 at the 2005 Masters is legendary. Thanks to video and the internet, it's available for all to witness in exact detail.

When reading the Gospel of Luke, we are not privy to a play-by-play reel. Many facts are present, but Luke leaves out particularities that first-century readers would have known. Over the centuries, some details surrounding the Christmas story have become inaccurate. The overarching storyline remains true – Jesus was born in poor and humble circumstances, but other nuances of the story need our attention.

Let's consider three questions. Why Bethlehem? Did Joseph and Mary receive hostility or hospitality? Why was there no room in the guest room (inn in many translations)?

Bethlehem. Joseph returned to Bethlehem to be registered for Caesar's decree because he was of "the house and lineage of David (Luke 2:4 ESV)." Mary also had family ties through her relative Elizabeth, whom she had spent time with immediately after learning she was with child. The prophet Micah said this about Bethlehem, "from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days (Micah 5:2 ESV)."

Hostility or Hospitality. It is commonly viewed that Mary and Joseph were shunned when they arrived in Bethlehem. In the first-century Middle East (and still today), mandatory hospitality was the norm. This equals protection and provision (even to strangers) with no questions asked. Regardless of the circumstances, scholars believe that Mary and Joseph would have been welcomed and shown hospitality, not hostility. Likewise, throughout the world, women about to give birth are assisted and given special attention.

Guest Room. Luke uses the Greek word *kataluma*, defined as "guest room, guest chamber, upper room." It is not a lodge or hotel. Small homes typically included an upper room or a room in the back for guests. Two possibilities as to why Mary and Joseph didn't get the room are: other guests were already using the room, or it was not an appropriate place to give birth in case something went wrong.

Mary and Joseph didn't come into Bethlehem in a rush (probably not on a donkey either), "And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth" (Luke 2:6). They had time to prepare a place for her to give birth. A family stable was often inside the home – in the front or lower level. Since the shepherds were in the fields, the stable was available and made a reasonable place.

Unlike the details of Tiger's chip, we can't replay the Christmas story verbatim. What we can do is revisit the scene with fresh eyes and welcome Jesus' birth story with renewed wonder and awe.

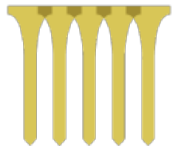
Prayer – Lord, help us today to understand the Christmas story with eyes and hearts full of wonder.

—

Tracy Hanson

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WHAT ARE WE SOWING?

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. (Galatians 6:7, NIV)

Earlier this year, I was at a tournament. I walked by a player on my way to the 18th green who was visibly upset. I asked a rules official outside the scoring tent what happened, and she said the player had self-reported a rules violation for brushing the sand in a bunker—the result was a two-stroke penalty.

The self-reporting aspect of golf can test a player far more than talent or skill.

I recently wrestled with a decision that I took to God, saying something along the lines of, “God, I want to honor you in this situation, but I don’t want to cause more trouble for myself than is absolutely necessary.”

Translation: Is there any way I can get out of this?

A few minutes after I said that prayer, I went on a walk and cued up the next sermon on my podcast list. The sermon’s title: “Deception.”

For the next 25 minutes, I listened to Dr. Ed Young detail Jacob’s deceiving ways in his “Winning Walk” series.

Needless to say, I had my answer!

In Galatians, Paul warns: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” (Galatians 6:7-8, NIV)

Even innocent errors in a game that ultimately yield no advantage but still break the rules can eat up our insides if not confessed. It’s easier to call a penalty on ourselves than live with the consequences of a lie.

There were severe consequences when Jacob dressed up like his brother to deceive his father and receive Esau’s blessing (Genesis 27). Not to mention the fact that Jacob’s mother designed this elaborate hoax.

Sometimes when faced with a moral dilemma, we call upon people we know will help talk us into doing what we want to do rather than what we should do. Even well-meaning people who love us and want what’s best can lead us astray.

When faced with a moral dilemma, seek God first for direction. He will always point us toward the truth!

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” – Romans 12:2

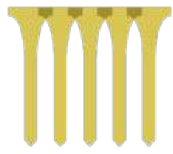
PRAYER: Father God, thank you for forgiving us of the times we fail to live in truth and light. Thank you for teaching us a better way.

--

Beth Ann Nichols

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Mary, the Mother of Jesus

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. (Luke 1:26-27, ESV)

This week certain characters are gathering in Orlando, FL, for the 2022 PNC Championship. I'm not referring to the Disney characters but rather to pairs of golfers like Tiger and Charlie, Annika and Will, and Nelly and Peter. Oh, I mustn't forget John and John II.

While I'm looking forward to watching the golfers go head-to-head, the Christmas Story contains a much more intriguing group of characters to keep our focus on. In a previous devotional, I shared about the town of Bethlehem. Today, I invite us to consider Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Some traditional views represent Mary as sentimental, soft, and meek. I suggest that Mary embodied a robust confidence in God, carried mental and emotional strength, and had fierce courage.

Let's consider three elements of Mary's story:

Age. In the first-century culture, girls were often given in marriage between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. In describing Mary as a virgin, Luke gives a clue that Mary was likely in her mid-teens when the angel Gabriel said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you (Luke 1:28)."

Betrothal. A first-century betrothal was typically a year-long process. It was a formal marriage contract arranged by the parents with the couple's consent. The legally binding betrothal period could only be dissolved by divorce or death. I wonder if this flashed through Mary's mind and heart upon hearing that she would conceive and bear a son before the consummation of her marriage with Joseph.

The Lord called Mary into a difficult position within the honor and shame culture in which she lived. We know Joseph didn't divorce her, but in that moment, Mary did not know what he would choose. Yet, Mary responded, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word (Luke 1:38 NRSV)."

Here am I. Your translation might have the word behold instead of "Here am I." The Greek word is *idou* (pronounced ee-doo) which means look or behold. *Idou* is often used to imitate the Hebrew word *hinnê* (pronounced hinneni), which takes us to a scene in the Biblical narrative when God summoned Moses at the burning bush, "Here I am (Exodus 3:4)."

In the face of potentially facing divorce and shame, Mary answered a divine summons from God. Rabbi Joel Nickerson says, "Hineni is about being present on the precipice of change." This takes confidence, strength, and courage.

Mary, a teenager, stood on a precipice that would change the world and said yes, I am willing, regardless of the cost. Today, God is still looking for people willing to say, "Here I am."

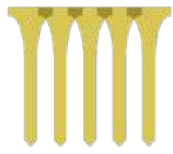
I find it much easier to slink away from the hard things God asks of me. But when I answer yes, like starting the Tracy Hanson Initiative, the impossible becomes possible.

Do you hear God summoning you...how will you answer?

Prayer: Father God, thank you for wanting me to partner with you in your story. Help me hear your voice and, in turn, respond with confidence, strength, and courage.

—

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Uncertainty

And now, compelled by the Holy Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. (Acts 20:22, NIV)

Every time a golfer addresses the ball, they have an intended outcome in mind. The shot will stay in the fairway, be close to the pin, or go into the hole. The problem each golfer faces is what might happen after impact. The future remains unknown until the ball is struck. No matter how well any golfer has played, there is no way to remove all uncertainty.

How we address uncertainty in life's big and small things speaks volumes about what we truly believe. How can we know what God wants us to do in any given situation? Should we depend entirely on our ingenuity to predict the future, or should we trust that God will work out whatever is troubling us?

Believers in Jesus serve a God that lives outside of time. We live in time, so the present is the only thing we can manage. We can't change the past, and the future is uncertain as it largely depends on what we do in the present. How do we decide what to do to ensure the outcome we want? Our scripture for today speaks to this very thing.

Knowing full well that his future holds hardship, the apostle Paul says the Spirit compels him to go to Jerusalem without knowing what might happen there. Living with uncertainty about his future, nevertheless, he pressed on.

He doesn't know what the future in Jerusalem holds, but he knows that the Holy Spirit is compelling him to go. As all the unknowns of the future closed in, he boldly followed the Holy Spirit's direction.

Dealing with uncertainty involves, at a minimum, two choices. We can either trust God in the present to work out our future or try to help God by manipulating our current circumstances.

It primarily boils down to whom we have more faith in, ourselves, or his wise guidance. Do we trust God with our future, or do we trust in our maneuverings in the present to fend off the evil that might await us?

How we answer that question largely depends on our faith in God's goodness. Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. All of us hope for a good outcome in every circumstance. God has precisely that in mind for us, even though the outcome might be different than what we expected.

We can scramble and scheme in our strength, or we can confidently trust in the love of God to work out everything in our life for our good.

Trust Him, listen to the Holy Spirit, and move forward to the unknown future. He leads, we follow, and the peace of God will overcome our uncertainty.

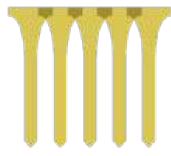
Prayer: Father, thank you for controlling our future. Remind us that our present and future good are under your sovereign control.

—

Linda Ballard

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The Famous Needle-Mover

So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. (Matthew 4:24, ESV)

“Golf has become a sport without needle-movers,” according to a recent Golf Digest article. The author summarized the decline of TV viewership of the PGA Tour to three points: 1) “Golf audiences broadly don’t care about any specific player,” 2) “A good story, rather than any single personality, is what resonates with golf audiences,” and 3) “The LIV defections, like Rahm’s, look increasingly absurd” and “the individual players might matter so little that it’s not actually doing any real damage beyond perception.”

A spike in recent viewership occurred on Sunday of the 2024 American Express tournament. Nick Dunlap, a college amateur, captured the golf world’s attention as he methodically worked his way around PGA West to win his first PGA tournament and break Phil Mickelson’s thirty-one-year record since an amateur has won a PGA Title. Dunlap became a needle-mover for one day because of his story.

The premise of the Golf Digest article jars a few similarities to when Jesus started his ministry and is familiar to us today.

During the early first century, many divisions existed among the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Herodians (Jewish elite sympathetic to Rome for selfish reasons), and the common Jewish people.

Today, we have competing theologies between denominations and a significant decline in church attendance in the United States. In both contexts, the focus is not on God; often, it is on humans doing what is right in their own eyes.

What resonated with the people who did take notice of Jesus? He taught the people through parables (stories). He healed them. He offered hope. Jesus told his story, and it changed their lives. When we stop to listen to another person’s story, space opens for an encounter with God. We experience connection and belonging with one another and to the One who created us.

There were players in Jesus’ life, like Judas, who betrayed him and others who failed to remain loyal and faded away, having zero impact on the Gospel spreading to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:47).

There will be people in every generation who refuse Jesus and turn away from God. But when believers lock arms in unity (it doesn't mean an absence of differing opinions), the power of the Gospel message breathes life.

The PGA Tour may not have a current "needle-mover" (aka Tiger), but if you are a follower of Jesus, then you know the supreme "needle-mover." Despite all the hard things happening in the world – wars, natural disasters, financial and health hardships, differences in church denominations, and the decline in church attendance, Jesus' fame is forever true.

Our stories are his story. His story is our story. With him, we all become needle-movers.

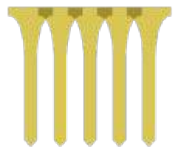
Prayer: Lord, make me a kind and compassionate needle mover through the power of the Holy Spirit. Help me stay loyal to Jesus and rest in his story.

—

Tracy Hanson

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Steady Growth

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of seeds, but when it has grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." (Matthew 13:31-32, ESV)

"Four golf fundamentals are grip, stance, posture, and alignment," I told my small audience. They followed my demonstration and then jumped into slots to hit balls. I wanted to help but trying to tweak someone's golf swing in ten minutes for lasting change is futile.

I played my first rounds of the year before and after this clinic, working on my fundamentals too. After not playing for three months, what I feel is rarely what is happening. My college coach friend helped me get my posture right, especially on my chipping. However, I did notice some feel from the three months of doing drills in my basement—repetitive, slow-motion movements to help my body learn the body positions I want.

A quick fix to hit the ball straight would be amazing. Sometimes we latch on to something that works for a few holes or rounds, but then it disintegrates. Often, we attend to our spiritual lives in the same way. We pick one thing from a sermon or scripture verse and feel spiritually energized. Maybe a particular song moves you emotionally for a day or week. These moments have substance, but they don't lead to lasting change.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." At a surface level, we recognize repentance as confessing our sin(s). Looking into the Greek word *metanoeo*, we find it involves regret or sorrow, accompanied by a genuine change of heart toward God (CWSB Dictionary). Confessing a sin is good but does not always equal long-term change. *Metanoeo*, repentance, leads to a consistent [re]turning to God daily.

The second part of Jesus' statement leads to the understanding that the kingdom of heaven is not something we die to enter when our earthly body fails. Rather, the kingdom of heaven is in every moment of every day - the present and eternity.

Jesus used parables frequently to challenge the religious status quo and help the listener internally process a concept that would lead to action. In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to the smallest of seeds that grow in rough places over long periods and become large trees. Like the mustard seed, our faith might feel small and insignificant, but it can grow in substance and size over time.

The kingdom of heaven is a gradual, steady, uninterrupted movement of growth. Living in the kingdom of heaven requires the practice of repentance – returning our hearts to God over and over and over again. Spiritual maturity requires persistence.

In what ways do you need to [re]turn back to God today?

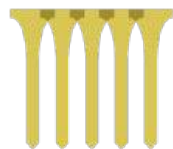
Prayer: Lord, open our eyes and hearts to the kingdom of heaven today.

—

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The Little Putter Girl

...for the righteous falls seven times and rises again. (Proverbs 24:16)

Recently, I came across an Instagram reel featuring an adorable scene of a 4-year-old girl engaged in a putting challenge. Positioned about three feet from the hole, she attempted to make the putt repeatedly, but each time, the ball missed the hole.

Undeterred by her initial failures, she eventually picked up the ball, placed it an inch from the hole, and, with determination, made the putt. Her face lit up with a big smile as she scooped the ball out of the cup, thoroughly satisfied.

What struck me most was her unwavering focus and determination. Despite the challenges, she remained steadfast and approached each attempt with childlike faith.

In watching this little girl, several parallels between her adventure and our faith journey with Jesus on Earth became apparent. First and foremost was her childlike faith, akin to the faith Jesus encourages us as His followers.

The girl believed, with unwavering certainty, that the ball would find its way into the hole. Similarly, Jesus extols the virtue of believing without seeing, stating, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

The innocence of her faith mirrored the simplicity Christ calls us to embrace, urging us to become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). We must believe.

Moreover, the little girl's misses did not discourage her. Despite repeated failures, she remained focused on the prize – getting the ball into the hole. In our faith journey, we, at times, miss the mark, experiencing moments of sin and falling short of God's glory.

The word "sin" itself translates to "missing the mark," reminding us of our flawed nature. Yet, through Jesus Christ, our Advocate, we find forgiveness and the strength to rise again from failure. Proverbs 24:16 assures us that though a righteous person falls seven times, they will rise again, emphasizing the resilience and forgiveness available through Christ.

The struggle and persistence displayed by the little girl also reflect the perseverance required in our faith journey. St. Paul's words in Philippians 1:6 echo this sentiment, assuring believers that God, who began a good work in them, will bring it to completion.

Just as the girl did not give up despite her challenges, we are called to persevere, trusting that God is with us, guiding us toward eternal glory (getting the ball in the hole!)

For those who may struggle more in their faith journey, there is solace in knowing that the Lord is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Stumbling and falling may occur in life, but God promises that He will complete the work He started in us.

His love and glory surround us, preceding and following us through life's trials. We are carried, like children, through the Red Sea of struggles, sin, and temptations toward eternal salvation.

Faith, trust, and perseverance are key, just as the little girl believed she would putt the ball into the hole – a testament to the certainty that, with our faith and eyes fixed on Jesus, He will finish the hole for us and through us as our hearts trust in Him like children.

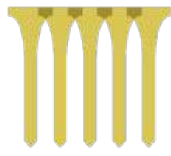
Prayer: “Lord, teach us to trust you like a child.”

—

Meredith Kirk

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The Goodness of God

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden was the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. (Genesis 2:8-9, NIV)

The Waste Management Phoenix Open produces the largest crowds on the PGA Tour who consume excessive amounts of alcohol, break decibel sound barriers on hole 16, and forget acceptable human behavior.

The stadium hole's hillside amphitheater provides a natural social hub for golf fans. It is close to the spectator entrance, and the straightforward par-3 makes anything possible. However, the novel football-like fan experience at TPC Scottsdale has pushed beyond controllable limits.

The 2024 tournament reached new milestones of drunkenness, leading authorities to close the gates and stop the sale of alcohol on Saturday. By Sunday, many tour players were frustrated and angry at the out-of-control behavior.

We can only hope the tournament organizers will make changes and future fans will not continue doing what is right in their own eyes.

At the beginning of creation, God provided Adam and Eve with everything they needed in the Garden of Eden. God's goodness also knew he had to teach them limits. So, he placed one tree in the middle of the garden they were not to touch.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die' (Genesis 2:16-17)."

God instructed Adam and Eve to work and keep the garden, to participate in expanding his creation, and to enjoy the fruit of their labor. God also asked them to trust him with the one no (the tree) in a sea of yes' (everything else). His goodness is wrapped with limits.

Unfortunately, they chose to do what was right in their own eyes.

We are no different. We want God's goodness without limits. We want comfort without adversity. We want success without hard work. We want God's blessings while doing what is right in our own eyes. God's goodness doesn't work like this.

On this side of the cross, God's goodness is in Jesus. Jesus is God's yes when we need to turn from doing what is right in our own eyes. We need to study Jesus. But life with Jesus also includes limits, not to punish but to protect us.

Are you experiencing God's goodness and limits? Are you trusting God when he says no, or are you choosing to do what is right in your own eyes?

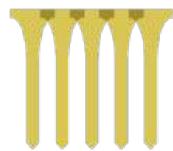
Prayer: Lord, I need help today. Help me trust you in all ways – when you say yes and when you say no.

—

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When God Hears Everything

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV)

Fans love it when tour players are mic’d up. It’s a chance for fans to feel closer to the action and, hopefully, get to know the athletes better. Few players, however, are keen on the idea. Many see it as a risk not worth taking, and in today’s viral world, it’s easy to understand why.

It’s humbling to be part of the Links devotion-writing team. Especially when I know all that would be revealed if I were to be mic’d up for four days. The idea of someone being able to hear everything I mutter under my breath behind the wheel or when I’m in a particular tizzy makes me cringe.

This past Sunday, our pastor talked about making sure the sweet water of the Spirit flows out of our mouths and not the bitterness of the enemy. I had to jot that down because I often let a complaining spirit take hold and linger too long, especially when working on the road.

The Bible talks often about the tongue. Proverbs 15:4 says, “The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but the perverse tongue crushes the spirit.”

For Christians who serve an all-knowing Father, all the world is a “hot mic.”

I set out to write about the importance of guarding our words, deeply convicted by my own, and then a wise friend reminded me of the broader point: The grace that covers that sin.

In his book, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*, the late Tim Keller said, “The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

As we all strive to clean up our acts in various ways, don’t lose sight of the fact that God hears it all – and loves us just the same. We didn’t earn that grace; it was undeserved and freely given.

What a beautiful message to breathe in and pass along.

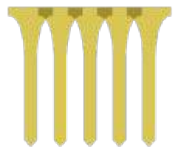
PRAYER: Father, thank you for loving us deeply despite our sins. Thank you for the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Forgive us for the things we say and do against the light.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Links Players

A Model for All Time

Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. (Psalm 37:3-6, NIV)

David Cook, Ph.D., a Sports, and Performance Psychologist, helps elite athletes and high-level executives elevate their performance. He is known for two things within the golf world: the author of *Seven Days in Utopia* and his patented model of concentration.

Cook's model is often shortened to See It – Feel It – Trust It. These three phrases gradually funnel our concentration from a broad to a narrow focus. The sequence is designed to grow a golfer's confidence, increasing the successful skill execution of the golf shot. This model has great potential! Though we know golf is difficult, this model is immensely helpful.

See It –visualize the shot desired.

Feel It –feel the movement of the swing for the desired shot.

Trust It –commit to what has been seen and felt and execute the swing.

In our passage today, the Psalmist offers a model to help guide us in our spiritual journeys as we live in this broken world. Trust – Delight – Commit.

Trust in the LORD, and do good. Trust is actively placing our confidence in our covenant relationship with God and his Truth. The good we do flows from his unbreakable love, and the motive is rooted in bringing glory to God and pointing people to Jesus. We dwell in God's land of security and safety through ongoing wholehearted engagement with him and his character.

Take delight in the LORD. Seeking our joy in God's friendship and love is a privilege, not a duty. As we engage with God with our mind (thoughts), our body (emotions), and our soul (spirit), our desires will shift toward the good things which God wants to give. God spoke through the prophet Micah, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)."

Commit your way to the LORD. The Hebrew idea is "...rolling a heavy burden from ourselves on another, or laying it upon him, so that he may bear it (Albert Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible)." God wants to carry our burdens. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28)." Walk with intention and purpose today and then leave the results to God.

Following the Psalmist's model of concentration to trust, take delight, and commit our way in the LORD lends to a life founded on justice, love, and humility. A life of good repute is built on such a foundation and shines as bright as the sun at noonday.

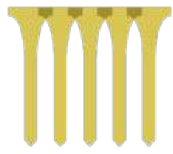
Prayer: God, you alone are worthy of our attention and praise. Help us to trust in you, take delight in you and your words, and to commit our way to you today.

—

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Generational Wealth

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14, NIV)

There's been a lot of talk in golf of late about generational wealth. How much does a person need to build it? And at what cost? Is it worth more than legacy, loyalty, or commitment? Is it worth re-wiring one's moral compass to obtain it?

Generational wealth is defined simply as assets that are passed down from one generation to the next.

Last weekend my husband and I attended the early service at our church, which has a more traditional style of worship. As the lyrics for "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" stretched across the screen, I was struck by the language of this hymn, written 100 years ago.

I thought about the generations in my family who sang this hymn and others like it in pews across the Midwest and even back to my family's early Christian roots in England. What a gift to pass down!

"Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be."

I was listening to a sermon podcast last year while driving through cornfields on my way to an airport. While I can't remember who I was listening to, the message that it only takes one generation to knock down a family rooted in faith for generations still rings in my ears.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:14 about the concept of being equally yoked. Much like a farmer would pair two oxen of equal strength to get the best results, making the work lighter for both, so are we to forge our strongest bonds with those who follow Jesus.

Suppose a Christian marries someone outside the faith and stops going to church or goes only periodically. In that case, it increases the odds that their children will not go to church or have a relationship with Jesus because it was not modeled in the home by one or both parents.

Of course, the opposite can be true as well. As one generation can amass enough money to change the trajectory of their family tree for hundreds of years, so can one person who comes to Christ lay a foundation of Christian living for their children and their children's children.

What is the greatest asset that you're passing down to your children and grandchildren?

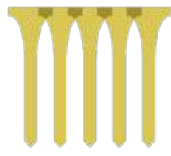
PRAYER: Father God, thank you for making us rich in the most important ways imaginable. Thank you for the priceless gift of your son Jesus. Please help us to equip the next generation to be stronger than the last.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Defeating Red Lizards

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)

As a new student approached me on the lesson tee, walking with his golf bag slumped over in a downcast posture, I sensed he was feeling defeated. Upon our introductions, he candidly expressed, "I don't think this old dog can learn new tricks." In his early seventies, he had stagnated for many years in progressing with his golf game.

I gently corrected his mindset, delving into the concept of neuroplasticity—our brain's ability to change and rewire itself. I explained that such transformation is not only scientifically possible but is also aligned with spiritual principles.

In Romans 12:2, Paul emphasizes the divine call to be transformed through the renewal of the mind, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Yet, the question lingered: how does one initiate this transformation? How can thinking, behaviors, and habits ingrained over decades be changed? Drawing inspiration from C.S. Lewis's novel, "The Great Divorce," specifically chapter eleven, I recounted to my student the tale of a man grappling with a red lizard on his shoulder—a metaphor for sinful desires, destructive behaviors, and negative mindsets.

The man in the story was on a journey in the afterlife and faced a choice: to allow an angelic spirit to kill and transform the lizard into a magnificent stallion, symbolizing redemption and spiritual growth. He was initially resistant to letting go of the red lizard, but his eventual acceptance became a potent symbol of the internal struggle against sinful nature. The man finally believed he could change and that he could live without the red lizard.

This allegory may resonate with all of us because the red lizard can symbolize diverse struggles residing in our flesh. Like the golf student who believed change was impossible for his golf game, many surrender to red lizards, succumbing to lies about transformation's impossibility.

Regardless of life's season or age, we as Christians possess the power to consciously change our minds and rewire our thinking. You can teach an old dog new tricks!

The pivotal step is allowing the Lord to eliminate these red lizards—negative influences or thoughts—attached to us. Ephesians 4:22 emphasizes shedding the old self and donning the new, created in God's likeness, “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Additionally, in 2 Corinthians 10:5, we're urged to demolish arguments contrary to God's knowledge, taking every thought captive to obey Christ. When we release the deceptive red lizards (quit believing their lies) and submit our minds to our Creator, transformation becomes possible.

If you feel defeated in an area of your life (chronic negative thoughts, actions, sins, and habits), dismiss the notion of improvement as an impossibility and reject that lie from the red lizard.

The Lord desires us to rise like stallions, liberated from the red lizards binding us, running our races to eternal glory. As creatures of a loving Creator, surrendering our will and minds to Him ensures that He can and will effect change within us.

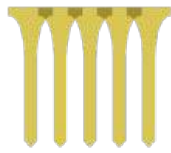
Prayer: Lord, remove any red lizards in our lives that hinder us and renew our minds.

—

Meredith Kirk

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Attunement of the Lord

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. (Exodus 3:7-8, NIV)

I'm about to get back on the course after a two-month break. I feel uncertain and a little anxious. How will my body feel? Will I be able to swing the club the way I envision? Can I meet the expectations that come with being a professional golfer?

I never seem to experience a secure attachment to my game. I am always working on something. I struggle to rest in the joy of the game for the sake of the game.

This reminds me of Moses' story. He grew up in Pharaoh's household in Egypt after being separated from his birth family. He lived in comfort while he watched his people suffer under Pharaoh's hand. Ambivalence (feeling two contradictory emotions simultaneously) must have weighed him down.

One day, he saw an Egyptian beat a Hebrew and was compelled to strike down the Egyptian. The very next day, a Hebrew man turned against him, "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Afraid of Pharaoh and his people, Moses fled to Midian.

The Lord led Moses through the desert to a new family, a new land, and a new way of life. The Scriptures tell us Moses was content to dwell with Jethro, but I wonder how often his thoughts returned to the family he left behind. He must have questioned where he belongs.

Forty years had passed when the Lord appeared to Moses "in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush Exodus 3:2)." When the LORD saw that Moses turned to see God called out to him. What follows is a picture of attunement and offering of secure attachment.

"I have indeed seen." God sees. He is paying attention even when his presence feels absent. We need to keep looking for God in our pain, confusion, and ordinary moments. "I have heard your cry." God hears when we cry out for help.

He may not answer in the way(s) we want, but he hears. "I am concerned." God understands our sufferings. He offers comfort and kindness.

"I have come down to rescue." God acts on our behalf and is with us. I have something different. God delivers. We may be led to walk through the Red Sea (uncertainty and hard things), but God will provide a way forward.

God longs for us to know his attunement (ability to know and respond to a child's needs) and to experience a secure attachment with him. He sees, hears, understands, comes down, and delivers us throughout our days.

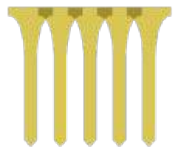
Prayer: Lord, help me to understand and experience your attunement and securely attach to you today.

—

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Life: Union with Jesus

So you must remain in life-union with me, for I remain in life-union with you. For as a branch severed from the vine will not bear fruit, so your life will be fruitless unless you live your life intimately joined to mine. (John 15:4, TPT)

Have you been able to pause and wonder what you are hoping for in 2023? Did you write down any goals or resolutions? Maybe you want to read your Bible every day! Pray more? Volunteer? Read more books? Spend more time on the practice range or chipping area (always a good idea).

Our new intentions are often action-oriented. This is not a bad thing, for life to move forward, we need to do things. However, our relationship with God expands when we stop all doing and start living in union with him.

You might be more familiar with this translation of today's passage, "Abide in me, as I abide in you (NRSV)." What does intentional abiding or remaining in life-union with Jesus look like? How does abiding in Jesus lead to bearing good fruit?

There was a significant moment in Jesus' ministry when many who had been following him no longer believed and walked away. Jesus asked his disciples, "Do you want to go away as well (John 6:67 ESV)?" They were wrestling with Jesus' teaching, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (John 6:56 ESV)."

Peter responds on behalf of the group, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:68 ESV)."

Jamie Winship, in *Living Fearless*, writes, "Peter, at least at this moment, understands that being with Jesus is not a contractual, transactional, quid pro quo that is worthwhile as long as it's working to his advantage. In fact, Peter explains his relationship with Jesus as quite the opposite." How often do we fall into a transactional relationship with Jesus?

Winship continues, "It's a divinely initiated, covenantal relationship, the benefits of which are quite one-sided. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life, and Jesus is the only hope because Jesus is the absolute Holy One of God, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter's part is to receive." And so, it is to be with us - receive.

As we walk through our days this year, may we choose life-union with Jesus. This will require us to ask questions, stop to listen, and then pay attention to what he has to say.

Jamie Winship offers some questions to help our abiding.

"God, teach me something about you and your universe that I do not know."

"God, teach me something about myself that I do not know."

"God, teach me something about someone else that I do not know."

"God, what is the most important thing you want to say to me right now?"

"Lord, would you tell me or reveal to me one place in my life where I'm not living in truth?"

Engaging honestly with these questions will deepen our life-union with Jesus and lead to bearing good fruit.

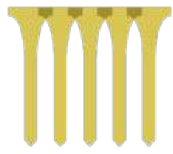
Prayer: Lord, open our minds and hearts to abide in you this year. Teach us to stop and ask you questions and then to listen and pay attention.

—

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Forgetting the Past

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18,19)

How easily do you shake off a bad shot on the golf course? Or a bad hole? Or a bad nine? Or maybe even a bad round? My husband used to tell me that he could tell how I played that day by the way I drove into the driveway. (In my defense, I wasn't a Christian then, but I'm still ashamed and sorry about that.)

One of the most critical components of a successful golf round is the ability to focus exclusively on the shot at hand, the one you are about to hit. You visualize the shot and run through your pre-shot routine.

You focus on the ball as you make each swing with one or more swing thoughts. There are thousands of tips, articles, videos, and seminars to help teach golfers how to focus during a round of golf.

But that forward focus cannot be achieved if you are still upset, mad, and irritated by the last golf shot you hit.

For the believer, the word of God directs our focus forward. We are given a new identity in Christ, the old is gone, and the new has come. Paul talks about those who will not inherit the kingdom of God: the sexually immoral, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, or swindlers. But he also says, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Don't you love all the 'buts' in the Bible? Here is a short list: "but God remembered Noah, but God said to Abraham, but God did not permit him to harm me, so it was not you who sent me here, but God, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever, but God knows your hearts, but God was with him, but God raised him from the dead, but God gave the growth, but God being rich in mercy."

All these "buts" show us the life-changing truth and power of the Lord Jesus that is available to each of us who has believed and received the finished work of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

And that goal is to be free of our past and fully accept and receive what our Lord has for us in the future. That future is not only in the “sweet by and by” but also applies to what is left of every day that he gives us breath. God calls us his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which he prepared in advance for us to do.

Will you confess (agree with God) your sins and allow him to cleanse you from all unrighteousness? He is faithful to do that—every time you mess up. There is freedom in keeping short accounts and not being dragged down by your past. God promises to bury that sin in the deepest part of the sea and remember it no more.

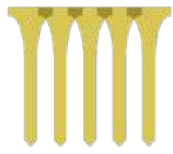
Prayer: Father God, will you help me not dwell on my past but press on to the new thing you have for me? Use me to your glory, in Jesus’ name.

—

Cheryl Martin

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Timely Moments

So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17, NASB)

Peering down the short par-3 twelfth, I breathed out my frustration at bogeying the par-5 eleventh. The wind, helping off my right shoulder, said solid pitching wedge. Kenny gave me the nod.

Settling into my stance, I eyed the green's right corner to accommodate a severe right-to-left slope. After glancing at my target, I set my swing in motion. The strike felt like a knife cutting through soft butter. Frozen on my left foot, I watched intently. The sun's glare blurred the first bounce, but a crescendo of noise erupted as the ball disappeared into the cup. An electrified funnel of wind swirled around us.

A hole-in-one at the US Women's Open on live TV and one of ESPN's top 10 plays of the day. I will never forget that Kairos moment (an appointed time, an opportune moment, or a due season).

Chronos time, a measure of forward-propelling minutes and seconds is how we measure our days, months, and years. We go about each day doing what needs to be done. We say time is flying by, or we feel it moves at a snail's pace. Many parents tell their children, "Stop wasting time." Or maybe we are reminded of this ourselves when social media pulls us into a rabbit hole.

Jamie Winship in *Living Fearless* introduces the idea that time doesn't pass; instead, it is "merely a measurement of the movement of objects in space." The rising and setting of the sun measure daylight and darkness. The tick of a clock or the lock screen on our phones reveals the time at a specific moment. Our days, beginning with our first breath, move through this measurement of time until death. But time is also beautiful and created for the purpose of moving us forward in what God has for us.

Here enter Kairos moments that have the potential to alter our lives in ways we never dreamed possible. A Kairos moment is evidenced when you meet your spouse, the day you meet Jesus or the birth of a child. Sometimes we are blind to these appointed moments because we don't see or believe where God is leading us. Or we just say no to them.

God is patient and will keep offering Kairos moments, even when we miss them. Our work is to return our focus to him, "looking to Jesus, the founder, and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2a ESV)."

As Chronos time marches us forward this year, Kairos moments are waiting. Be intentional in looking for them. Seek God's wisdom. Ask, "Lord, where are we going? What do you want me to know? What do you want me to do?" The journey might be wide and easy or a hard climb. Look for the beauty in it all and make the most of your time.

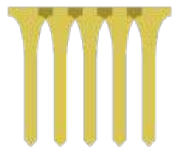
Prayer: Lord, thank you for the movement of time. Lead us, show us, and talk with us throughout the year. Open our eyes to the Kairos moments you already have planned.

—

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Speaking Up!

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:2, NIV)

The average round of golf in America takes over four hours. Add in time spent in the car, the parking lot, and the grill room, and there's ample opportunity to have meaningful conversations.

Not just meaningful conversations but hard conversations.

How often has a topic come up casually that caused you to shut down? A million thoughts raced through your mind, but fear kept you from saying any of them out loud.

Oh, sure, the Bible is clear on the topic. But speaking up about what Jesus had to say about it might lead to an avalanche of uncomfortable moments.

We've all been there—likely more times in recent years than ever before.

Isaiah 43:2 (NIV) says: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

This is not a free pass from hardship! But it is a promise that He stands with you when you step into the fire.

We often think of this in terms of big-ticket problems, but small conversations plant seeds of significant consequence.

If the people of the church won't stand up for God's truth, who will?

Hard conversations about complex cultural issues don't have to be combative. They can be as simple as a series of questions that prompt the other person to flesh out a viewpoint, setting up the chance to pose a different approach.

It's essential to engage in such conversations with believers and unbelievers alike.

In Matthew 28:19-20, known as the Great Commission, Jesus says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

We are to disciple others, that is, spread the gospel of Jesus to those who do not have a personal relationship and also to those who do and are pressing into this lifelong journey of becoming more like him – holy.

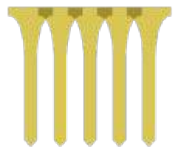
So, let’s take on those tough cultural topics. Research them, and ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and heart to His character.

Let’s step into the fire with Jesus and help each other become more refined!

PRAYER: Father God, we thank you for standing with us in all situations. We ask for your wisdom and courage!

—

Beth Ann Nichols
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Persevere

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard; keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13:32-33,ESV)

Wyndham Clark. If you aren't a fan by now, then jump on the train. Wyndham gallantly won his first PGA Tour victory in early May. A long time coming and a lot of work in between. Six weeks later, he rose to the challenge again, winning the 2003 US Open. Wyndham has persevered through loss, depression, anger, and frustration.

Three years ago, Wyndham was a wrecking ball. His caddy, John Ellis, and former college coach gave him an ultimatum – change your attitude or quit golf. Wyndham listened and started a new path.

He shifted his attitude, got help, and surrounded himself with people who gave him reason to believe again. A player never knows when their breakthrough is coming. Wyndham's time has arrived.

The Biblical narrative carries a host of storylines where God's people stumbled through one hardship after another, but through perseverance and staying faithful, day in and day out, God brings them through to something new. This something new doesn't always match what they (or we) thought it should be. What is consistent is that the glory goes to God alone.

Take Joseph, Jacob's son, for example. Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his sons. With a pop of arrogance in his step, Joseph stirred up friction among his brothers. You can read the entire story in chapters 37 through 50 in the book of Genesis.

Here's a snippet of what Joseph experienced: thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, accused of adultery, thrown in prison, re-enters the service of Pharaoh, prepared Egypt for the great famine, his brothers come asking for help, Joseph tests them, Joseph forgives and rescues his father and entire family from famine.

Twenty years after being thrown into a pit to die, God lifted Joseph to hold the most powerful position in Egypt. I wonder what cycles of unbelief and heartbreak Joseph experienced during that time. Did he want to quit? Was he angry at God? What was his attitude really like on those days in the damp prison?

We may not be the person who wins the US Open or saves an entire nation, but we are a part of this really big God story, and we have a role to play. Are you struggling with your purpose? Are you angry at God? Is your attitude dragging you through the mud?

Be encouraged today that you are not alone and that God does care about all the details you are experiencing. Explore Joseph's story to help nudge your attitude upward. Look for the shiny pearls of perseverance. Lament with God and share your anger. Be still and listen. God will speak to your heart.

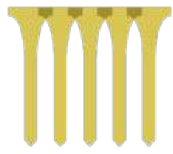
A time is coming when the Lord will return. In the meantime, keep persevering.

Prayer: Lord, some days are just plain hard. Help me to persevere. Help me keep my attitude in a positive direction. Help me be on guard and be awake to where you are working in and through me.

Tracy Hanson

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Abandonment to Faith

*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
(Philippians 1:21, NASB)*

I loved the dialogue and bantering on the Golf Channel centering on the success of Scottie Scheffler. Everyone has an opinion. They intimated that Scottie's faith gave him a little advantage and helped him perform better.

One of the commentators remarked that he believed his faith was like having another mental golf coach that helped his performance. I thought, "They have no idea what they are talking about."

No, Scottie Scheffler's faith is his life, and his golf score does not define him. God defines him as He does all of us. God says, "This is my beloved child, and I love him very much."

Several years ago, a candidate for a political office who had repeatedly talked about his faith in Jesus was asked this question, "If you are elected, can you separate your faith in God from the issue at hand and represent the people who elected you and keep your faith separate?" I loved his answer: "Absolutely not. I have found that my faith informs my answer, which will lead to what is best for all people. Aren't we to submit and serve one another and really love one another? When we all do this, the results are the best for all."

Our responsibility is to surrender and abandon ourselves first and foremost to God for His glory. Our usefulness and momentary glory or challenge are His concern, not ours. You see, God is in both the glory and the challenge. He is all and in all. He is in the blessing and also the thorn. Our challenge is to abandon ourselves to both.

Abandon may be a strong word to some, but we all have so many choices to make every day. Abandon, in this case, may mean knowing God so well that we will be filled with his wisdom to make the right choices.

It means many times making the hard choices to follow the narrow way. In his book *Abandoned to God*, Oswald Chambers says it this way: "I have to make an effort to keep my conscience so sensitive that I walk without offense. I should be living in such perfect sympathy with God's Son that in every circumstance, the spirit of my mind is renewed, and I make out at once what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Once we become infected with Jesus, our life explodes and changes. We are all becoming who we should be. C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*: "The Christian way is different: harder and easier. Christ

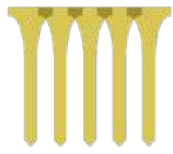
says, ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money, and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there; I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself; my own will shall become yours.’” (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity)

Scottie Scheffler will probably be known as one of the greatest golfers of this generation, and yet that does not define who he is in God’s eyes. On that last day, what is more important—major championship wins or faithful service and abandonment to our Savior? I think we know the answer.

Closing prayer – As we grow closer to you, enable us to abandon ourselves to your plan and your way.

—

Randy Wolff
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Links Players

Being Found

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:8-10, ESV)

I found it. Three words that flush relief over a golfer's cortisol when a lost ball is found. The current Rules of Golf have a tight three-minute rule for looking for a lost ball. If the clock strikes one hundred eighty seconds, the golfer must take a stroke and distance penalty and return to where the last golf shot was played. In layman's terms - add two strokes to your score. There is no way out of incurring the penalty.

Two of Jesus' parables were about rejoicing when something precious had been lost and then found again. One contrasts the joy when a lost sheep is found (Luke 15:4-7) with rejoicing in heaven (God) when one sinner repents. Jesus then seamlessly slides into the parable of a lost coin.

A silver coin, a drachma, was equivalent to an entire day's wage of work in the first century. Most homes in the Sea of Galilee region were built with a dark volcanic rock called basalt. Light was scarce in these homes, and a lost coin of such worth would have been extremely hard to see and find in the crevices of the rock. And to really get his audience agitated, Jesus made a woman the hero of the story when she finds the coin in such challenging surroundings.

In the parable of the lost sheep, a sheep is lost because it wandered off. The lost coin was lost inside a house. In other words, Jesus suggests we get lost by wandering away, or we can be lost right where we are. Sometimes our beliefs and choices leave us lost, and at times we feel lost because of harm perpetrated against us (outside and inside the Church).

Either way, there is good news. In her book *The Lord is My Courage*, author K.J. Ramsey describes God's love this way, "God leaves behind the ninety-nine pretty and perfect-seeming parts of you to find and restore the one part of you that feels too broken and lost. There is no part of you that the Good Shepherd will not seek and follow to extend goodness and love."

There is no part of our brokenness (be it anger, anxiety, trauma, depression, bitterness, shame) that is too much for God. There is no crack or crevice that is too dark or dirty. God's *Hesed* love (lovingkindness) searches until we are found. "God is too kind to leave you behind," says Ramsey. And if you're too weak when he finds you, God will put you on his shoulders and carry you home, rejoicing the whole way.

God's love is fierce...how do you need to be found today?

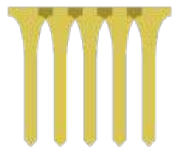
Prayer: Lord, help me be honest about where I am feeling lost. Please come find me.

—

Tracy Hanson

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God Does Not Call the Qualified; He Qualifies the Called

Who am I? (Ex. 3:11)

Walking into the position of National Women's Director for Links Players International last August was a thrilling yet overwhelming experience. It marked the beginning of a crucial phase in establishing a solid foundation for the women's ministry.

While I didn't find the task of building this foundation daunting, I faced challenges in overcoming natural fears associated with such a role.

Would the women accept me as their leader? What if I made a wrong ministerial decision and failed? How could I unite the existing women with the newcomers in the women's fellowships? And would my relatively younger age hinder their ability to take me seriously?

These questions swirled in my mind, reminiscent of Moses when God called him to lead his people out of slavery. Moses' initial response was, "Who am I (Exodus 3:11)?" And God's reassuring answer to him was, "I will be with you."

Have you ever felt underqualified for a significant task? Has this feeling prevented you from taking that leap of faith and trusting in God despite your fears and doubts?

It's essential to put such fears and feelings into perspective.

The truth is that none of us are ultimately qualified. As Psalm 103 eloquently expresses, "The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust" (Psalm 104:13-14). Additionally, Isaiah reminds us that even our best efforts are akin to filthy rags (Isaiah 64:5).

So, what truly qualifies us, then?

Jesus is the only one who can qualify us. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10)."

Jesus does not call the qualified; rather, he qualifies the called. Calling the unqualified has always been God's specialty. We can look to the heroes of our faith in the past—David, Solomon, Joseph, Esther, Ruth, Moses, Miriam, Deborah, Lydia, and the list goes on.

Therefore, we must continue to step out in faith, embracing the Lord's calling upon our lives and trusting him to guide us every step of the way. As the psalmist proclaims, "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1). We may not be worthy or feel worthy, but there is only one who is truly worthy, and that is Jesus Christ, as revealed in Revelation 1:17-18.

Hence, we must step out in faith and obedience, serving the Lord's Kingdom without allowing fears and feelings to dictate our destination and his call on our lives.

As believers in Christ, we have been purchased at a price and redeemed by His shed blood. As the Apostle Paul proclaims, "He saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which has now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 9-10).

The Lord has graciously provided you with all the necessary tools and resources for today as you fulfill your calling in the Kingdom. You have been called, and each day, you will receive the necessary equipping to carry out your purpose.

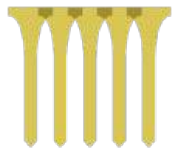
Prayer: "Lord, empower and strengthen us to walk out our Holy calling. Amen."

—

Meredith Kirk

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Righteous Integration

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Matthew 25:31-33 ESV

“That’s good.”

“That one we’re going to need to see.”

We hear these comments, sometimes with a twist of banter, in any casual round of golf. Why do we give gimmes when the object of the game is to get the ball into the hole?

“I know you can make that putt,” is a nice sentiment, but not always true. The average 80s shooter only makes sixty-four percent of three-footers. Yet, I see a lot of gimmes given in that range, while others are tight-lipped and believe all putts should be putted into the hole. There is a divide among golfers, sometimes creating tension among friends and competitors.

The story about the King who will separate the sheep from the goats represents a divide among people as well (Matthew 25: 31-46). On one side will be the sheep who unknowingly served Jesus through offering food, drink, clothing, and care to strangers.

The other side is reserved for those who had no part in helping the hungry, sick, and poor. These people may have an absence of faith in Jesus. But they may also be religious people who are stuck in keeping their commitment to Jesus separate from other parts of their ordinary lives.

At first glance, this passage gives the impression that if we don’t serve the poor and needy then we will not be blessed or have a place in the Kingdom of God. I don’t believe this is Jesus’ main intention in telling this parable. Rather, might Jesus be revealing the importance of our heart’s intentions?

Are we choosing dos and don’ts as a way of earning points to earn a place in God’s Kingdom? Are we segregating our love for God from the world around us because it feels easier?

There are many nuggets we can take from this parable. For today, let’s ponder the concept of living an integrated life. According to Skye Jethani, “The righteous do not segment their lives into

categories of “sacred” and “ordinary;” they do not view some activities or people as important to God and others as unimportant.”

Are we like sheep (righteous)...allowing our love for God to flow into and out of all areas of our lives? Agreeing or disagreeing with another person should not be the barometer for how we share kindness and compassion.

May we consider two things: In what ways are we integrating our faith in Jesus into more parts of our lives? And, in what areas might our faith still be segmented to the boundaries of religious activities?

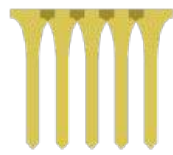
Prayer: Lord, help me today see and respond to the areas of my life that still need redemption and integration.

—

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Finding a Way Out

My dad and I spent countless hours at our local driving range, which was usually more dirt than grass. I like to sit in a chair on the range, like he often did, and think about our times together while watching the cows graze in the nearby pasture.

When I'm hitting it poorly, I turn to phrases he would often say about how I take the club back, my right wrist, and my right foot. I can still hear his voice, loud and clear. (I also hear him say, "Go help your mother!")

During a recent pre-tournament press conference, I asked Lydia Ko what she'd been working on with her instructor. Her answer rang true. "Honestly, the same things," she said, "sometimes when things aren't going your way, you feel like there may be new solutions to those problems. Most of the time, it's really the same kind of tendencies."

We are creatures of habit, both good and bad.

As I've struggled with the same swing flaws over the years, I've also struggled with the same sin.

Our church recently went through a sermon series on the book "Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table." In the book, Louie Giglio talks about the practice of rededication at church, where we take the same struggles to the altar time again, promising God that this time we will get it right. Promises we often can't keep.

Giglio writes, "Here's a big danger: We rededicate our rededications so often we reach the point of hopelessness. We conclude nothing's ever going to change. Something must be wrong with the gospel. Or something must be wrong with us."

The solution? Rather than promising God that we will fix the problem and not do it again, the best thing we can do is surrender it.

In 1 Corinthians 10, we find Paul imploring the church of Corinth (and us) to heed the lessons learned from the Israelites. The struggles of today are not new.

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

We are not alone in our temptations. They are “common to mankind.” And rest assured, God will provide a way out.

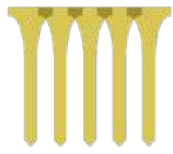
PRAYER: Father God, we thank you for your unending mercy and for your patience as we learn to surrender our flawed tendencies to you and let your Holy Spirit lead the way.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Links Players

Gathering Together

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25, ESV)

The white linen draped the table. Eleven simple yet elegant place settings welcomed us into the room. Aware that some would be missing tonight, we began introductions. California, Texas, Florida, South Carolina, and Michigan present for our Inaugural Links Ladies Golf Trip.

Over a delicious meal, I watched and listened in awe—a long time waiting for Links Players International. A vision our beloved Jeff Hopper and I had more than six years ago.

My role was to show up, share a few encouraging words, lead a golf clinic, and play golf. Our National Links Women's Director, Meredith Kirk, and travel director, Barbara, did the hard work behind the scenes. Over four days, fellowship leaders from different locations cross-pollinated stories with laughter and tears, encouraged a few to start a new fellowship at their club, and all caught the vision to nurture and grow more opportunities for women to lock arms in changing the conversations at their golf clubs.

Many of you practice gathering with a Links Fellowship during the week. What a gift! I assume it is a time when you stir one another to love and good works, encouraging one another. If you are not in the habit of gathering, please be encouraged to find a Links Fellowship and begin participating. If there is no ladies' fellowship in your area, pray for others to join you.

I understand that the answer to this question is not as easy as it sounds. Gathering together in small groups of people might feel intimidating, or maybe the idea drains you of energy (I will raise my hand). It's okay; you're not alone. For the social humans out there, maybe not prioritizing time for intentional gathering reigns at the top of your list.

In our individualized culture, especially post-COVID, we scurry through the day checking off our to-do lists at home and work, we over-commit, comparison keeps us isolated, and in ministry, we serve the Lord to exhaustion. Days, weeks, and months flash before our eyes. We can feel alone in a sea of people.

Gathering together to stir one another up to love and good works is not about doing more for the Lord. Rather, it is a pathway to becoming "the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Intentional community helps sharpen and deepen our faith. Purposeful gathering together opens a gateway to be seen and known by others, a God-given longing of our souls.

The Day of the Lord is drawing closer...let us not neglect our need to meet together and encourage one another.

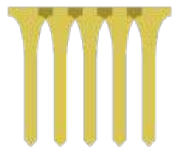
Prayer: Lord, thank you for both Men's and Ladies Links Fellowships that provide purposeful and intentional gathering places. Help me to find a purposeful and intentional community where mutual encouragement stirs me to love and good works.

—

Tracy Hanson

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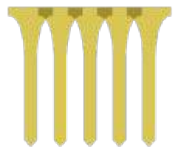
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Good Exhaustion

For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:10)

Last summer, I experienced a few weeks during which my busy schedule prevented me from playing golf. However, one afternoon, amidst this long stretch of commitments, I managed to squeeze in a late afternoon range session at TPC Myrtle Beach, my familiar stomping grounds.

It was a beautiful, hot, and humid South Carolina day, and finally, I was getting some respite from my hectic schedule. I was eagerly anticipating the opportunity to work through each of the clubs in my bag and make any necessary adjustments to my swing.

I began by warming up, stretching, and hitting some soft-pitch shots when I noticed dark and eerie storm clouds on the horizon, rapidly approaching the golf course.

I was slightly taken aback by the storm since I had checked the weather beforehand and saw nothing on the radar. However, living on the coast, I knew that storms can unexpectedly emerge. Within minutes, I heard the lightning siren, signaling the end of my much-needed break.

There's a saying that goes, "You are either going into a storm, coming out of a storm, or going to go into a storm." Life is full of storms, both literal and metaphorical. Sometimes we can see them approaching from afar, while other times, they catch us off guard.

In 1 Peter 4:12-13, Jesus tells us that we will face trials on Earth: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

These trials and storms in life serve to refine us. They help us shed our character defects, vices, shortcomings, and negative attitudes that can entangle us. Like a potter with clay, these trials have the power to mold us into the image of Christ if we embrace the suffering and allow it to work within us. This is what I call "good exhaustion."

As I walked off the range, frustration overwhelmed me. I felt like a whiny, tired toddler on the inside, desperately in need of a timeout. Then, I heard the sweet sound and gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit, pulling me out of my self-pity and reminding me of Jesus' words. When we find ourselves lacking the strength to face the storms or trials, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV).

As a 'recovering' overachiever, I needed that storm to remind me of where my strength, rest, and power truly come from. I had thought that spending a good hour on the range would provide the relief I needed, and undoubtedly, there is some joy in that. However, even in the simple act of Jesus taking that opportunity away from me, it caused me to reflect on His promises.

He is always with us in every storm and trial we face in life, whether catastrophic or a mild summer storm; we can trust Him and know that as the rainbow appears after the storm, so will His promises remain for us.

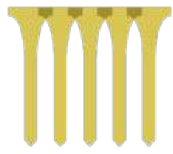
Prayer: "Lord, help us to rest in you."

—

Meredith Kirk

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Divine Appointments

We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps. (Proverbs 16:9, NLT)

We talk a lot about routines in this game. How many practice swings do you take before each shot? Do you pick out a small target in the distance or use a clump of grass on the ground to line up? Do you tug at your hat or pull on your sleeve before pulling the trigger? My dad used to waggle the club so many times I wanted to scream! Just hit it!

The point is, we're creatures of habit, especially in this game. Maybe you have a precise warm-up routine. Or a foursome you like to play with every Saturday.

It's so easy to get so caught up in our routines, the to-do lists that we miss the assignments God had for us that day. I've returned from several work trips lately and questioned how I'd handled a few exchanges. Did I rush through that conversation? Did I square up to that person and give my undivided attention? Or was I so concerned with what they'd interrupted or what I had to do next that I missed the moment?

Perhaps that encounter was No. 1 on God's assignment list for me that day.

Routines are important. They lead to consistency and success if you're doing the right things. They bring calm and comfort in the midst of chaos.

But, sometimes, the routine or to-do list needs to be interrupted. Sometimes the interruptions are the assignments!

The acquaintance who flagged me over on the way to the range might need to talk to me more than I need to hit 25 balls before the round. The stranger on the first tee who spoiled my solo round might be my divine appointment.

Psalm 118:24 says, "This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." (NLT)

Something powerful happens when we wake up each day and ask the Lord to guide our steps and ask Him to use us to advance His Kingdom.

We begin to look at interruptions or detours as opportunities.

Proverbs 16:9 tells us: "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps." (NLT)

God is sovereign. Let's submit to his will for who we talk to, how long we talk, and what we share. How can we go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) if we don't stop to talk?

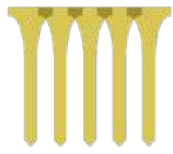
PRAYER: Father God, we thank you for divine interruptions to our day. Please help us find the courage and the discipline to be intentional about stepping outside our comfortable routines and friend groups to make a connection.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Follow Me

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" (John 21:21-22, ESV)

When I played on tour, I kept my golf stats with rudimentary marks. A check equaled a fairway hit in regulation, a colored-in circle celebrated a green hit in regulation, and an empty circle revealed a missed up and down. A dollar sign with one vertical line was a failed green side bunker save, while two lines represented a sand save. Putts hit were labeled by the number (1, 2, 3). This was enough for me.

In today's high-tech world, stats that will make you scratch your head are available for professional golfers at www.golfstats.com. For example, I searched Tracy Hanson and learned my Career at a Glance stats: Starts: 319, Cuts Made: 220 (69%), Top Tens: 17 (5%), Rounds: 989, Scoring Avg: 72.68, Best Finish: 2nd (2 times).

Absorbing these stats can go two ways: curiosity and gratitude for the career I achieved or a compulsion to compare myself to my peers. The first leaves me in a growth mindset; the latter leads to self-condemnation and a feeling like I never measured up.

Comparison has a positive side when you objectively look for ways to improve. Evaluating ourselves against others (whom we respect) helps determine areas we can grow and do better in. The key word here is "objectively. Unfortunately, subjective comparison pokes our ego with self-consciousness, frustration, and fear.

In his work, *Inner Excellence*, Jim Murphy says this about comparison:

In our social-media-directed world, the new normal is a life of comparison. When we're constantly comparing, we often feel not enough, which causes self-protection, which leads to being easily offendable. When this is the case, we're always one comment away from conflict, just a puppet on a string, pulled in whatever direction someone's words or actions may direct us.

A subjective comparison was a weakness of our beloved disciple Peter. Moments after Jesus restored Peter into a relationship after his three denials (John 21:15-19), Peter stumbles into comparison, like a puppet on a string, as Murphy states. "Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them...When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man? (John 21:20-21)."

In the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians, we learn about a variety of gifts given to people through the Holy Spirit for the common good. The list includes wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

All of these gifts are empowered by the same Holy Spirit and appropriated to each of us individually as the Spirit desires (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). One isn't better than the other, but comparison comes swiftly and pulls us into a pit.

Jesus tells Peter, and us, to stop comparing, "You follow me!"

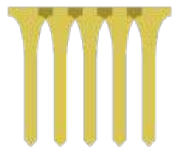
In what areas of your life are you in the pit of comparison? Turn back to Jesus and follow him.

Prayer: Lord, help me follow you alone.

Tracy Hanson

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The Gateway of Appreciation & Gratitude

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. (Matthew 26:26-28 ESV, emphasis mine)

Fatigue mixed with adrenaline pushed me along. Four days of rain delays and soggy fairways led to Hiromi Kobayashi and me standing on the 18th tee for a playoff.

This is my chance to win my first LPGA Tour event. I hit a good drive and adequate layup on the par 5. I picked a perfect lie since we could lift, clean, and place the ball. A slight breeze brushed against my face.

"I don't want to be short. I think I need to grip a nine iron." Nick agreed.

The ball compressed off the sweet spot. Dumbfounded, I watched my ball sail over the flagstick and dive-bomb into the water surrounding the backside of the green. Hiromi birdied, and I lost the playoff.

The sting of disappointment ran alongside my extraordinary appreciation and gratitude as I left the course. Appreciation for feeling alive in my body again. Gratitude for the opportunity to play and compete on the LPGA Tour. I had felt lifeless the prior three months since my mother's passing from cancer.

Appreciation and gratitude are similar and different. In his book *The Joy Switch*, Chris Coursey calls appreciation "packaged joy." I like how Brent Stromwall defines appreciation, "Appreciation is noticing and experiencing the good and beautiful aspects of life in a relational and personal way. Appreciation is something that we feel in our bodies—it has an effect (www.odigos.llc/post/joy-by-design)." We share appreciation to be relational with God and others.

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful for an experience, a thing, or an act of kindness towards us. Gratitude must be cultivated and is a way we form an attachment to God.

The practice of appreciation and gratitude activates and helps grow an area in the right hemisphere of our brain called the joy center. James Wilder, author and speaker says, "Relational circuits in our brains open us up to a relationship with God and others. Nothing opens those circuits as much as gratitude." A Jesuit priest states, "It's not joy that makes us grateful; it's gratitude that makes us joyful." Appreciation and gratitude increase our capacity for joy.

Directly faced with suffering, Jesus gave thanks and refused to relinquish his joy. Practicing appreciation and gratitude may not remove our pain or suffering, but it will help us bear our pain and suffering like Jesus, "...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...." (Hebrews 12:2).

How might you consider practicing appreciation and gratitude today?

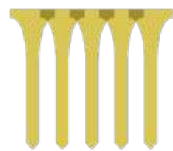
Prayer: Lord, thank you for how you have intricately created our brains to be relational through appreciation and gratitude. Help me offer my appreciation and gratitude in real and tangible ways today.

—

Tracy Hanson

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Ten Sayings: A framework to life

Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" (John 2:15-16, NLT)

"PGA Tour pro suffers brutal SIX-putt at the Cognizant Classic." The writer behind this Golf Digest headline called it a disaster, but only Tom Detry is responsible. His six-putt was due to his anger.

I've been there. You? Dub a chip and start whacking the ball with no reason. Maybe the bunker was the culprit; before you know it, your tantrum adds several strokes to your score. I once acquired a two-shot penalty at the US Women's Open for slamming my club into the sand in anger as the ball rolled back at me.

If anger is not helpful on the golf course, why is Jesus' anger in the Temple during Passover honorable?

Verse seventeen of today's scripture passage peeks into the answer, "Zeal for your house will consume me (Psalm 69:9)." But to fully explain Jesus' anger, we need to drift further back to the book of Exodus and the Ten Commandments.

As twenty-first-century followers of Jesus, we tend to superficially know the Ten Commandments, but we lack a deeper understanding from a Jewish perspective.

A Jewish Rabbi friend refers to the Ten Commandments as the Ten Sayings. These sayings are ten categories of understanding for our relationship with the Lord and with other human beings (Read Exodus 20:1-17). There is also a pairing effect within the Ten Sayings. Let's explore.

The first (I am the LORD) and sixth (Don't murder) teach us to not do away with relationship because it is the very thing God created us for – relationship.

The second (Have no other gods) and seventh (Don't commit adultery) reveal not to betray relationships as we are created for oneness with God and others.

The third (Don't take God's name in vain) and eighth (Don't steal) tell us not to violate relationships by taking God's honor away or wrongfully taking from another.

The fourth (Remember Shabbat) and the ninth (Don't bear false testimony) demand us to safeguard truth: be in God's rest and be honest.

The fifth (Honor father and mother) and tenth (Don't covet) admonishes us to not forget we have an individual self. When we lose the sense of who we are, we hurt God and others.

We all fail in each of these categories. Thankfully, the Apostle Paul reminds us, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1 NIV)."

Jesus' anger in the Temple was a statement. Stop violating the essence of the Ten Sayings. Let's keep wrestling ourselves back to the truth found in God's Ten Sayings and be the light of God's love to those around us.

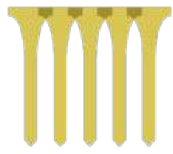
Prayer: Lord, I need your help and wisdom to experience understanding through your Ten Sayings so that I can be your light.

—

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The Asbury Awakening

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:40-41, ESV)

As I write this, the Asbury revival is set to end next week. Asbury seminary president Timothy Tennent wrote in a blog post that he believed it wise to think of the weeks-long services that attracted tens of thousands to Wilmore, Kentucky, as an "awakening." Only in time, he said, will we know if a lasting transformation has genuinely occurred.

Tennent described attending services on campus during that time as "stepping into a flowing spiritual river." As reports began to circulate about similar awakenings taking place across other campuses throughout the country, many have no doubt thought, "Hey, I want some of that!"

Classes at Asbury weren't canceled during those weeks because leadership desired to mainstream renewal into the very fabric of their everyday lives.

"We all love mountaintop experiences," Tennent wrote, "but we also know that it must be lived out in all the normal rhythms of life."

Something supernatural happened at Asbury, and people flocked worldwide to be part of it. What might happen if we all prayed for an awakening?

What if your small group prayed for an awakening at your golf club? At your workplace? On your team? In your family?

Awaken us from our slumber, O Lord! Many believers need this message, too!

At some point years ago, in the margins of my Bible above Deuteronomy 6, I wrote, "Loving God is everyday life."

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

We can't sleepwalk through this life of faith! To love fiercely is to live with great passion. To live holy lives requires great discipline.

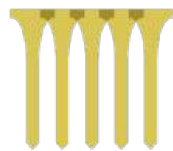
PRAYER: Father God, we pray for a spiritual awakening in our communities. We pray for lasting transformation. Come, Holy Spirit!

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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When God's Answer Is More Than You Dreamed

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4, NIV)

I have a friend who tells people that she's praying for God's best for them.

I honestly didn't think much of it years ago, but as my husband and I struggled with infertility and turned our focus toward adoption, her words kept popping into my head.

What does God's best for us look like?

Experts believe there are 2 million families in this country waiting to adopt, which means that for every child being placed, there could be dozens of families submitting their profiles. In our experience, even in foster care, we could be one of 50 families who submitted a profile. In private adoption, sometimes more than 100 families had their profiles shown to a birth mom.

The average wait time for our agency, Lifeline, was two to three years.

Before starting this process, I hadn't considered the pain of rejection. But before submitting a profile to a birth mom or foster care agency, so much thought and prayer must come first. If the answer is "yes," life is forever changed! Therefore, every time my husband and I agreed to have our profile shown, we had to be committed on a deep level.

We thought the 9-year-old would be ours. We felt the same about the six-month-old twins. The toddler in foster care in our hometown – surely he was meant for us. As the rejections piled on, I kept crying out to God.

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

Through it all, we kept talking to God, striving to understand what he desired for us, following where we felt the Holy Spirit lead.

Until one day, in mid-July, we received the call that changed our lives. It wasn't for the 10-year-old we'd been praying for well over a year. It was for a seven-month-old baby whose mother asked on an early-morning Zoom call, "How soon can you get here?"

My oldest friend immediately dropped off diapers and other necessities on our doorstep. We bought a car seat on the drive up, and about nine hours later, we met our son, Jordan.

On Dec. 15, Jordan became ours in the eyes of the law, though God had it planned from the beginning.

Jordan is God's best for us. And because God told me as the months went by to widen our prayer circle, so many have rejoiced with us on a deep level.

Jordan is our miracle.

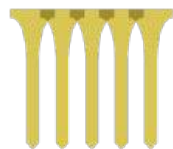
PRAYER: Father God, we thank you for the gift of family. We thank you for prayer warriors who come alongside us and pray that your desires become ours. Help us to be that person for others in the New Year.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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A Different Lens

And behold, a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" Luke 10:25-26 NASB

I asked my caddy if the putt was downhill. He said, "Yes, a little downhill." It was a lot downhill, and I hit it past the hole and missed my comeback putt. The Epson Tour player asked me whether she should allow her caddy to read her putts.

Reading greens requires clear analysis through what you see, past experience, and practice. Ultimately, a caddy can assist, but the player must process the information and execute it. Understanding the Bible often feels like reading a fast, undulating sixty-foot putt. Bible teacher and author Brad Gray says, "The Bible was written for real people in real places in real situations at real times. Yet most of us don't take into consideration the Bible's context."

The Bible is not a modern text. Its clarity and meaning are not straightforward. Gray adds, "We need to read and then interpret the Bible through the lens of its original context."

This is what Jesus did when he pointed the lawyer back to the Torah and asked him, "How does it read to you?" He sent the Lawyer back to the origin of his question – back to the laws written to the Israelites, laws for them to follow that set them apart from other nations.

In a previous devotion, I referred to the Ten Commandments as the "Ten Sayings." In the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), the words on the tablets are called Aseret ha-D'varim in Hebrew. D'varim comes from the Hebrew root Dalet-Beit-Reish, meaning word, speak, or thing.

Now that we know a little Hebrew, we can accurately translate Aseret ha-D'varim as Ten Sayings, Ten Statements, and Ten Declarations, but it does not accurately translate to Ten Commandments. Whatever you decide to call them, understanding context reveals the Ten Sayings are more than individual laws; they are ten categories.

There are six hundred and thirteen laws written throughout the Torah. The Israelites knew each one of these laws and failed to follow them. We also fall short at upholding God's moral code and living in his wisdom.

Thankfully, we aren't bound by the law (it still provides moral code and wisdom); we are bound to the one who fulfilled the law - Jesus (Matthew 5:17).

Brad Gray challenges his readers, "Are we doing the best we can to read responsibly?" Context matters, and learning to read greens requires expanding our tools, asking different questions, and a lot of practice.

Let us not be like the Lawyer (an expert in Mosaic law) who, by testing Jesus, missed the depth of God's Story. In a future devotional, I will share a framework for reading the Bible in context. Stay tuned.

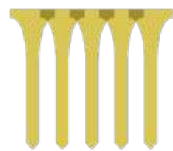
Prayer: Lord, help me today to be willing to dig into your Word with curiosity and wonder.

—

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Moment of Impact

*For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?
(1 Corinthians 3:4))*

I've been a golf instructor for twenty-five years. Part of evolving as an instructor involves remaining receptive to learning and refining one's teaching approach and philosophy.

Participating in continuing education sessions for golf instruction among seasoned professionals is vital to growth and often leads to stimulating and sometimes intense discussions.

Each instructor has developed their unique teaching philosophies and methodologies. They hold firm confidence in their approaches to golf instruction, having witnessed firsthand the effectiveness of their methods.

Similar dynamics surfaced during my time in seminary among professors, each with their distinct theology and doctrinal beliefs, albeit with variations. Even though there were differences in interpretation of scripture, my Professors always aligned on the foundational principles of the Christian faith.

In golf instruction, the ultimate objective is to develop a functional swing with a solid impact being paramount. The moment the clubhead connects with the ball is crucial, and seasoned golf instructors unanimously acknowledge its significance. It's all about impact.

As for Christians, it's all about the moment we believe in Jesus and surrender our life to Him; that is impact.

Sometimes, as Christians, it is easy to lose sight of 'impact.' Serving in ministry I often hear questions amongst Christians like: "What denomination do you belong to?" or "Which church do you attend?"

It's one way for the inquirer to learn where the person may fellowship, but it can also gauge theological leanings and church affiliations, whether Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic, Orthodox, or non-denominational. The same would apply if you ask a golfer who their instructor is; you can gauge what instruction methodologies they lean toward.

I've reached a point where I deflect such questions, even if the intentions of the inquiry are good. Faith in Jesus Christ should not be categorized in such a manner. I don't believe God is as concerned about these labels as some humans are.

Just as in golf instruction, where we have exceptionally talented teachers who are often correct, they are not infallible. Likewise, Christian leaders and teachers, past and present, can err because they're fallible humans. We all are.

Consequently, we should be careful to follow too closely any individual, whether it be modern-day preachers, reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin, Augustine, Popes, or even the Early Church Fathers. While we can learn from them, as many of them are incredible servants of the Lord, focusing on Jesus Christ is the most genuine way to be a follower.

Jesus is the 'Word' meaning 'Logos' of God, the living Word of God, fully God and yet fully man, who came to reveal God to man and redeem all who believe in Him from their sin. We follow Him because He is perfect and infallible.

The Apostle Paul cautioned the Corinthians against following any man, including himself, emphasizing unity while directing attention back to Jesus Christ (Read 1 Cor. 3:4-9). He underscored that fixation on individual teachers and leaders' doctrinal differences fosters division.

If asked about my denomination, I respond with the words of the Psalmist, "I am a friend to all who fear God, to all who follow His precepts (Ps. 119:63)." This answer reflects the heart's disposition and emphasizes adherence to God's path for believers.

I desire my alignment to be with those who genuinely love and serve God, irrespective of creed or label. Our mission as Christians and golfers is IMPACT for the Kingdom of God in Jesus' name. Let's prioritize that focus. Let us follow the only perfect one, our Lord Jesus Christ.

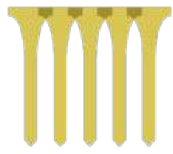
Prayer: "Lord, help us to remain united with all believers."

—

Meredith Kirk

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Treasure

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21, NIV)

Every golfer must decide what part of their game needs the most attention. What will we practice today? That question must be answered before we pull a club from our bag. What skill needs to improve to lower our score? Where should we expend our energy and focus? It would be the most fun to practice smashing our driver, but will that result in our overall goal of improving our score?

It seems so easy to get caught up in trivial things. How can we decide what actions should be the most important? How do we, as believers, decide what the real treasure is in our life?

Our verse for today is often referenced when speaking about our money and what we do with it, but it also speaks to a much bigger issue. Our time is one of our greatest treasures. It is in limited supply for all of us. We are all busy, and there are no do-overs if we waste this most valuable commodity. Is what we are doing in line with what God wants us to spend our time on?

The people in our life should be the most frequent recipients of our time. For me, when I am the very busiest, trying to finish my to-do list, a human crosses my path and allows me to accomplish something eternal.

If my perspective is focused on pleasing God, I will stop what I am doing and take the time to be the person the other person needs. Jesus lived His whole life like that. No human that ever crossed His path with a need was put off to a more convenient time. Since we are called to follow Him, this is a good thought about prioritizing our time.

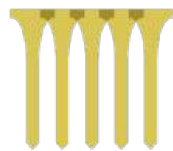
We all wonder how we are going to get everything done. We need to remember that our joy and peace don't ultimately rest in what we accomplish. They rest in our obedience to the call of God on our life. We should not neglect our greatest relationship—the one we have with Him.

If our eyes are fixed on Him, we will find the time to listen to His voice as He navigates us through the chaos of our life. In this process of seeking Him first, all the other things we want and need come to pass. In God's economy, our two greatest tasks are to love Him and our neighbor as ourselves.

If our heart belongs to Him, and we listen for His direction, everything we do is counted for us as treasure in heaven.

Prayer—Father! Please help us to redeem the time you have given us. Let us use it to send true treasure ahead of us to heaven. Amen

Linda Ballard
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Motivated by Love

It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:7-8, ESV)

Golf is, in essence, an individual contest. If you shoot under par (with or without a handicap), the golfer beats the course. Anything else, and the course retains victory.

There are exceptions to this rule of play. High school and college golf are team sports with an individual component. To be a successful tour player these days, you require a team: strength trainer, nutritionist, instructor, agent, nanny, and caddy. Family and friends are included, but they are not onsite every week.

What about Christianity? Is a person's conversion to Christianity a solo experience between Jesus and the individual—what God does for me and what I do for Jesus?

Yes, every person needs to make his or her own decision to follow Jesus. And Paul writes like a coach to his team, "for you are all partakers with me of grace." Three times in two verses, Paul uses the plural all. Individuals join together in struggles (Paul's imprisonment) and in good (sharing the gospel). Paul's love for the Philippians acknowledged and encouraged their partnership with him (Philippians 1:5).

A Biblical Scholar and Sports Chaplain, Dr. Null, has shared, "We aren't defined by our accomplishments; we are defined by our relationships. But it is our relationships that make our accomplishments possible. Relationships give us emotional shock absorbers to deal with the ups and downs of sport and life."

Paul recognized the power of relationships for him and for the people he ministered to. The activities and accomplishments that we, as God's people, do are important, but relationships unite us as Christ's followers. If we get the order correct, then advancing the Kingdom of God is not dependent on our performance for God; it is the outflow of love. First by growing in our understanding of the depth of love God has for us individually, and then the love that brings us together.

The heart of a LINKS Fellowship beats strong when people love one another. The affection of Christ blooms when individuals (with differing opinions and thoughts) come together and unite as a team, abounding in love more and more, with knowledge and discernment (Philippians 1:9).

Paul encouraged his readers to understand what is excellent (verse 10) - to be different, not taking or giving offense or stumbling because of duty or religion. The fruit of righteousness (verse 11) yields better decisions, better disciples, and more faithfulness.

God's economy runs on love and relationships. Dr. Null shares, "For God, it's the relationships that matter first, not the product for his kingdom that is produced."

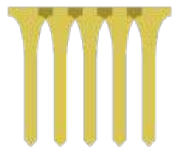
Prayer: Lord, your ways are not my ways. Help me to understand how much you love me and be motivated by love today.

—

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Slow Down and Feel

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29, NIV)

“You clicked into a different gear on that one,” I quipped at my Legends Tour friend on our final hole of the Arizona Women’s Senior Team event. Laughter covered the 18th tee box as I pushed my tee into the ground. I felt the tension begin to circle in my chest. One more birdie would be nice on the scorecard for my team, and the tee shot was important.

Settling into my routine, I picked my target. “I got this,” I whispered to myself. My goal for the day had been to stay in the moment. As my tee shot compressed off my driver, I yelled, “Chase Ashli’s ball.” I walked off the tee with a smile.

I have been working on paying attention to the stress activation and the negative beliefs that surface when I’m in competition (and in life). I am my own worst enemy. My words berate with verbal assaults. Even after four decades of competitive golf, I am still in the process.

God gave us the ability to think and reason, but he also gave us incredible bodies that experience the world through our five senses. Our bodies (nervous systems) often hold negative memories causing us to react to current circumstances and relationships with self-protection, defensiveness, or pride.

Maybe harsh words have rolled off your tongue before you knew what was happening? Has conflict ignited a need to defend rather than enter with curiosity? Does your pride leave you feeling valued or alone? In our humanity, we are not immune to any of these behaviors.

Peter, one of Jesus’ inner circle disciples, was no different. We witness his self-protection, defensiveness, and pride on multiple occasions. “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him...(Matthew 16:22 ESV).” “You shall never wash my feet (John 13:8 ESV).” “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away (Matthew 26.33 ESV).” Each time Jesus responded with gentleness and humility.

When the rooster crowed, Peter’s eyes were opened, and his sorrow wept. Not too many days later, Jesus stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and invited Peter to pause and consider his heart. Jesus engaged Peter on a heart level, not a knowledge level.

Jesus knows we carry the wounds done to us and the ways in which we have harmed others in our bodies. Healing begins when we slow down, to be honest about our pain and sorrow. Jesus didn’t ask Peter one time if he loved him, but three times. Healing our hurts is a layered and ongoing journey.

Rest for our souls is available. Jesus longs for us to slow down and pay attention to our burdens. Your emotions and feelings are worth consideration.

Caring for our souls is the precursor to bringing hope and healing to others. It is the pathway to being gentle and humble in heart like Jesus.

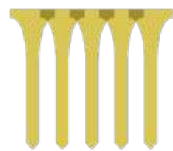
Prayer: Lord, will you help me slow down and consider what I feel and the burdens I am carrying. Help me be honest and live with a gentle and humble heart.

—

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Chasing Turkeys

Bear One Another's Burdens (Galatians 6:2)

She was one of the sweetest junior golfers I've had the pleasure of working with, a petite powerhouse on the course. Amanda, as she was known, stood out not just for her talent in golf and gymnastics, but for her diminutive stature, much smaller than her peers.

Yet, despite her size, she possessed a remarkable swing. I considered myself blessed to be her instructor, guiding her journey in the sport from the tender age of seven.

However, one October afternoon, as she arrived for our lesson, it was evident that something was amiss. Fatigue seemed to weigh her down, her usual enthusiasm replaced by weariness.

Each swing appeared forced, lacking her typical finesse. Sensing her need for a reprieve, I made a spontaneous decision to abandon our usual practice routine.

Securing a golf cart, I loaded our clubs, and we departed from the practice tee, seeking solace on the open course. With the late afternoon sun casting long shadows, we stumbled upon a picturesque scene: a group of turkeys leisurely roaming the fairway. Their contented gobbling made us giggle, a moment of levity amidst Amanda's fatigue.

In that instant, memories of my grandparents flooded my mind. Though they had long since passed, memories of our special times together always remained vivid.

In this moment, I heard my grandmother's voice, "Run Mere...Run...Scream Louder!". The vision of me at the same age as Amanda came to the surface of my mind, almost in a similar situation.

When I felt tired and burned out from practicing, my grandmother would encourage me to run and scream as loud as I could on the beach. We would do this in the late evenings when the beachcombers were gone.

She would say, "Chase the seagulls and scream as loud as you can and get it all out." Sometimes, she would encourage me to scream even louder! When she first told me to do this, I thought it strange, but I listened to her and tried it. I would laugh running around the birds, and she would laugh watching me, and I always felt immediately better. I loved visiting my grandparents at their beach home because I knew it was a place where I could fill up my 'life' tank again.

So, I jumped off the golf cart, and I said to Amanda, let's chase the turkeys while we scream as loud as we can. And off we went, running as fast as we could, chasing turkeys. She screamed, running down the hill in laughter, and before I knew it, we were even doing cartwheels together, and she was showing me her amazing gymnast flips. We laughed until we could not laugh anymore. That was the lesson for the day.

The Lord calls us to carry each other's burdens. Paul exhorts us in Galatians, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)." To bear one another's burdens takes awareness and mindfulness of those around us. Take a moment and think: is there anyone in your life that you sense is weighed down or in a low mood lately?

Whoever comes to your mind, ask the Lord to help you minister to that person. It can be something simple that helps to lift the weight and pressures of life off them—maybe a laugh, a kind gesture, a word of encouragement. The Lord will show you what to do, even if it means chasing turkeys! Let's be like Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross for Jesus out of Jerusalem; let's help carry the crosses of others today.

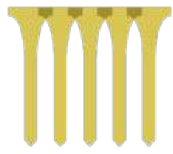
Prayer: "Lord, give us discernment on how to help relieve those weighed down in the pressures of life."

—

Meredith Kirk

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“Close...Or In?”

When Jesus saw that the man answered him wisely, Jesus said to him, “You are close to the kingdom of God.” And after that, no one was brave enough to ask Jesus any more questions. (Mark 12:34, (NCV))

As golfers, we all have stories of how close we came to what might have been. For example: “If that putt drops on 18, I break 80 - and it was so close!” Or “Just another foot, my shot clears the bunker and is on the green!” Maybe you can relate to these examples of “close but not quite.”

Golf is filled with examples of “close but not quite.” For example, Phil Mickelson is only one major away from accomplishing the professional Grand Slam of golf – having won all four major championships. In the history of professional golf, only five men have achieved it: Gene Sarazen, Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, and Tiger Woods. So how close has Phil come to joining that legendary group? He has finished 2nd in the US Open a heartbreaking six times.

On a similar note, let’s look at Sam Snead. Like Mickelson, he won three majors but no U.S. Open. How close did Sam come to the Grand Slam? He finished second four times, but also consider this fact: If Sam had shot 69 in the final round, he would have won 5 US Open titles – and tied for two more!

If you read the extended version of today’s story (Mark 12:28-34), the man’s elaborate answer prompted the compliment from Jesus, and the story ends there. But after reading this passage again, I began to think of it from a different perspective: how did the man react to what Jesus said?

Was he pleased that he had answered correctly? Was he content to know that he was “close to the kingdom of God,” as Jesus had said? Or perhaps he had a different reaction. Did hearing the words “you are close” prompt him to respond, “Teacher, I want to be more than close. What must I do to be in the kingdom of God?”

As followers of Christ, we know the answer to that question. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And Paul writes in Romans 10:9, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Entry into the Kingdom doesn’t require credentials, a recommendation, or a list of good works. It’s just Jesus. Not Jesus plus something else - just Jesus.

Returning to our Scripture, verse 34 ends the story, so we don’t know what happened after Jesus commented. But because Jesus was The Great Teacher, I think his compliment was meant as encouragement and an invitation to ask the follow-up question.

And if that's what Jesus was doing, it's a good lesson we can apply in our lives. We all know people that aren't in the kingdom. Some may be close; some may be far away. But whatever their situation, our role is to share the gospel's good news with them. And where we see signs of progress, let's offer them an encouraging word and an invitation to take another step, just as Jesus did in this situation.

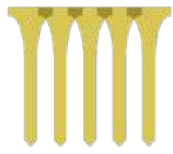
Prayer: Father, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Please help us share this gift with others so they may also be part of your Kingdom. Amen.

—

J.B. Bown

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How Much is Jesus Worth?

While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." (Matthew 26:6-9 NIV)

"Is that the new PING driver?"

"No, this is the G425. I have to pay for my equipment now," quickly jumped out of my mouth. "My driver is only a year old, and spending the money on a new one isn't worth it yet."

I think there are three types of golfers. The first golfer knows all about the current clubs and buys the newest driver because it will go straighter and further (supposedly). Another golfer covets the new technology but resists buying because of the cost. The third group cares very little about what is in their bag; their main objective is to merely have fun.

Here's the scoop. Getting fitted for a good set of clubs is important for better golf and is worth the initial time and monetary investment. If done well, this set will last many seasons, making the cost for the latest and greatest clubs each year unnecessary.

Considering the worth of golf clubs is trivial when compared to bigger issues of life, like the question, "What is Jesus worth?" In our scripture passage above, we find three individuals, the woman with the alabaster jar of expensive perfume; the disciples; and Judas (verse fifteen), who provide useful insight in answering this question.

People in the ancient world stored expensive ointments or perfumes in sealed alabaster jars to keep the contents from evaporating. The ointment likely is the woman's most prized possession, possibly her dowry or inheritance. It could also have been saved to lavish on a deceased loved one. But here, the woman pours all she has (physically and emotionally) over Jesus.

The disciples are indignant. While their motive is pure (to give the money to help the poor), they missed the opportunity to affirm that Jesus is worthy of this extravagance. Jesus kindly rebukes his disciples while lifting up the woman in front of the judgment in the room.

Further into the story, we learn that Judas, discouraged and disappointed with Jesus, asked the chief priests how much they would give if he handed Jesus over to them (Matthew 26:15). Judas accepted 30 pieces of silver, equivalent to about 100 days wage, as a worthy price for Jesus' life.

What is Jesus worth to you? Are you like the woman who poured her whole life on Jesus? Or do you resemble a disciple who does good things but holds enough back for security? Does Judas' frustration with Jesus feel familiar? Are you on the precipice of selling out on Jesus?

How we choose to spend our time, use our possessions, and leverage our influence reflects how much we believe Jesus is worth.

What is Jesus worth to you?

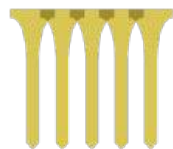
Prayer: Lord, help me consider this question, How much is Jesus worth to me? Convict, mold, and grow me to see that Jesus is worth everything.

—

Tracy Hansen

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When Our Callings Are Hard

Early last week at the PGA Championship, before Scottie Scheffler found himself at the center of chaos and in a jail cell in Louisville, he spoke with the media for the first time about being a dad. Days after wife Meredith gave birth to their son, Bennett, Scheffler found himself packing up to go to work.

“I miss him like crazy,” Scheffler said on Tuesday. “It was not easy to leave the house Monday morning.”

“I told my son as I was leaving, I was like, I don't want to leave you right now, but I need to. I'm called to do my job to the best of my ability, and I felt like showing up Wednesday night wouldn't really be doing myself a service this week when it comes to playing and competing in the tournament, so I had to show up, especially with the weather forecast, showing up, being prepared and ready to play and being back home as quick as I can.”

He had no idea what was to come on that work trip, of course. He just knew he was called to do both jobs – be a dad and a PGA Tour player – and he was called to do both to the best of his ability.

For anyone who works outside the home, and especially for those who travel for work, it's hard to leave. But that word “calling” carries great weight. It's a reminder that our vocations are no accidents. There's a purpose and an opportunity to every assignment, and the effort we put in impacts generations.

In 1 Chronicles 22, David has purchased a plot of land to build a temple. But the Lord told David that it would be his son Solomon who would ultimately carry out the task. David set out to get everything ready, preparing large amounts of iron, bronze, and cedar logs.

David said to Solomon: “My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God. But this word of the Lord came to me: ‘You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.’” – 1 Chronicles 22:7-10

Sometimes, when talking to the parents of great players, I often think about all the behind-the-scenes decisions that led to this moment. The bricks that were laid to build the foundation that led to something extraordinary.

“I have to go now, but I’ll be back as quick as I can.”

In Scheffler’s case, it was his mom, Diane, who would’ve said that. The family moved from New Jersey to Texas so that Diane could take a job as COO of a law firm in Dallas. That kickstarted a chain of events in Scottie’s life that led him to Royal Oaks Country Club and Randy Smith, his longtime instructor.

Scheffler’s father assumed stay-at-home duties to look after the four children. So many bricks laid by many to prepare the next generation for their unique callings.

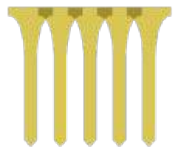
PRAYER: Father God, thank you for these sacred assignments and the strength and courage to say yes. We know there’s difficulty in every calling, and we are grateful that you’ve gone before us to prepare the way.

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Sacred Places

But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray (Luke 5:6 ESV).

When I was just eight years old, my family moved to Denver, Colorado, so my older sister could pursue her dream of becoming an Olympic figure skater. Amidst all the changes and loneliness that came with this move, I found solace in golf.

While my sister and mother were occupied with skating, my brother was away at boarding school, and my father was managing our family's company back in Atlanta. As a result, I spent countless hours on the golf course. I have jokingly said over the years that I was raised by PGA Professionals during those formative years.

The golf course that became my sanctuary was Foothills Golf Club in Denver. One hole on the back nine offered a breathtaking view of the majestic Colorado mountain range. Even as a young girl, I felt that there was something sacred about this spot, and every time I played it, I felt a strong desire to pray. Pushing my golf cart over the rolling hills and mounds, I often spoke to Jesus, hoping He could hear me, yet sensing His presence nearby. I found peace and comfort there; it was my special place with Jesus.

Loneliness is something that Jesus Himself experienced, often retreating to secluded places to pray and connect with His Heavenly Father, "In these days he went into the hills to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God (Luke 6:12). He prayed in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-2); He prayed in lonely places (Matt. 14:13); and one of His special places, while He was in Jerusalem, was in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39; Matt. 26:36).

In times of loneliness and solitude, we, too, can find sacred places to draw near to God and seek comfort and intimacy with Him. These consecrated spaces can help us quiet our minds and free us from the distractions of the world.

While experiencing seasons of loneliness can be uncomfortable and even painful, we can view these seasons as being ordained by the Lord to bring us closer to Him and to encourage us to rely solely on His comfort, peace, and guidance. Psalm 91:1-2 says, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

It goes on further in the Psalm and tells us the blessing of seeking the Lord's shelter, "Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent (vss.9-10, ESV)."

In the summer of 2021, I felt a strong call from the Lord to revisit my special hole at Foothills Golf Club, more than thirty years after I first found solace there. I took my youngest son with me, and the Lord met us there in a powerful way. He is a faithful God who sustains us through all the twists and turns of life,

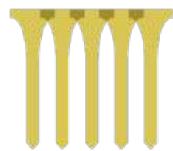
especially when we seek Him in the lonely places. The Apostle James reminds us when we draw near to God; He draws near to us (James 4:8).

Prayer: “Lord, you are our refuge and shelter. Draw near to us as we draw near to you. Amen.”

Meredith Kirk

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Who's Influencing You?

Solomon answered, "You have shown great mercy to your servant David, my father, because he walked before You in faithfulness, righteousness, and uprightness of heart toward You. (1 Kings 3:6a, MEV)

And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life. (1 Kings 3:14, NIV)

"Have you watched Knapp swing the club," Lewis asked as we sat down with tea in his living room. I mentioned I watched a few swings on a recent telecast.

"His tempo is what I want to emulate," Lewis continued as he played the DVR recording of Jack Knapp's round.

There's a term for when one person takes on the habits (good and bad) or characteristics of another person—the chameleon effect or mirroring. Often, this goes unnoticed by the people involved. For example, if you hang around a person who says, "Y'all," long enough, it will become part of your verbiage.

Have you noticed any characteristics of Jesus seeping into you? Does his kindness, generosity, ability to tell a story and teach, or love and compassion resonate?

How about his faithfulness (2 Timothy 2:13), righteousness (1 John 2:29), obedience (Hebrews 5:8), and servant heart (Mark 10:45)? We will never attain these four characteristics to perfection like Jesus, but like King David, who experienced failures throughout his life, we can still be servants who grow in faithfulness, righteousness, and obedience.

Faithfulness in Hebrew means truth. The Greek translates to trustworthy and believable. Our faithfulness keeps us on the path of allowing God's Truth, the barometer for measuring our words and actions. Jesus is trustworthy and faithful to his promises even when we feel faithless.

The Hebrew connotation for righteousness is blameless in conduct and integrity, along with justice, right actions, and right attitudes. God's moral perfection is to be our ideal according to the Greek. We only arrive at being blameless because Jesus took our brokenness upon himself. Every day, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us be more like Jesus and be thankful for God's forgiveness when we miss the mark.

There is no Hebrew word for Obedience. Instead, a Jewish person does Shema: to hear, listen, give attention to, and submit. The Greek meaning refers to the faith that obeys God's will. Obedience begins when we hear and pay attention to the Word of God and then act on it.

Servant. The most basic concept in the Hebrew language is that of a slave. Slaves in Biblical times had protection under the law and rights. The Greek language reveals that to serve means to wait upon, with emphasis on the work to be done, not on the difference in the relationship between two people. Jesus served all people regardless of rank, and he asks the same of us.

Is Jesus having the chameleon effect on you?

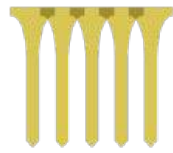
Prayer: Lord, in a world where so many things can influence me, help me to be changed by you.

—

Tracy Hanson

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Jesus Came To Change You

That day, when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped. (Mark 4: 45-37)

Every time I step onto the first tee, I have positive expectations, especially when the weather is favorable, and my body is not suffering from too many aches and pains. And I played well the last time I teed it up. But then life happens....

The story of Jesus calming the storm appears in Matthew 8, Luke 8, and Mark 4. These men didn't just happen to be in the boat – Jesus called them all to get into the boat with him to go to the other side of the lake. It was his idea. And then, a violent storm arose, which is not unusual on the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4: 38)

Storms happen in everyone's life. In this fallen world, it "rains on the just and the unjust." There is no getting around the storms of life regardless of your bank account, the quality of your marriage, or your health. You will have tribulation in this world.

But remember that Jesus came to change you, not your circumstances.

Since everyone will suffer in the storms of this life, as Jesus' followers, our approach to them should be obviously different from that of those who are not following the Lord. Thus, the world will see a difference.

How does a believer with cancer handle his illness differ from the way a non-believer with cancer does? How does a believer with a financial crisis handle things differently than a non-believer with a financial crisis? A loved one's death? A betrayal?

It is in the midst of the crisis that, as believers, we change. In recognizing our utter lack of control, we turn to the One who is sovereign over all circumstances. Knowing and understanding God's

sovereignty will change how you live your life. And here is where the peace that passes all understanding will come.

Leaning into the Lord during these difficult times develops a 'track record' in our lives. We can look back on those times and see God's fingerprints as he led, comforted, and walked us through the trials.

Jesus came to change you, not your circumstances. Will you give him permission to do so and cooperate with him as he accomplishes the task?

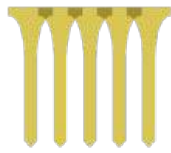
Prayer: Father God, thank you for loving me too much to leave me like I am. Thank you that you will be faithful to complete the work you have started. Thank you that I can trust in your sovereignty and mighty power.

—

Cheryl Martin

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Seeing as Jesus Sees

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:10-12, ESV)

The perks of being a "Legend" of the LPGA Tour member are slim. No free equipment, and our playing opportunities are few. I share this not to gain sympathy but to state reality. I have to be selective about what equipment I use based on cost and accessibility.

At a recent Legends event, two local PING reps offered their time to anyone who wanted to test the newest equipment. I jumped at the opportunity and greeted Todd with a handshake. Todd was exceptional at his job and knowledge of the PING clubs, and he was not bashful in sharing his love and passion for Jesus. For the next hour, we narrowed down my equipment needs while chatting about faith and God's Word.

In a previous devotional, I wrote about categorizing places, people, or activities as sacred or secular is not helpful. Continuing that theme, Todd shared with me three stories from the book of John where Jesus intentionally engaged three different people groups. In essence, declaring ALL are welcomed into a relationship with him.

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. (John 3:1-2)." Jesus conversed with Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, inviting him to be born again and enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-21).

"A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? (John 4:7-9)." The Samaritans were despised people by the Jews, but Jesus sat and talked with this woman, and through her testimony, many other Samaritans believed in Jesus.

"And at Capernaum, there was an official whose son was ill. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death (John 4:46-47)." Jesus engaged the gentile official, healed his son, and his whole household believed.

Jesus gave his life so that none should perish, but all can have eternal life (John 3:16). Remember, before you judge another, we all will stand before the judgment seat of God.
Have you met Jesus? He gives the living water that nourishes salvation.

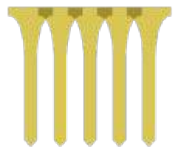
Prayer: Lord, help me let go of my judgment of others and see all people as valuable. Thank you for making a way through your son Jesus for eternal life, now and forever.

—

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Running To Us

I will arise and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. (Luke 15:18-20, ESV)

Running is not a dignified way of moving around the golf course unless you are a forecaddie or playing speed golf. A forecaddie meets his foursome on the first tee, exchanges pleasantries, and off he (or she) runs down the fairway to eyeball the incoming drives.

As the golfers roll down the fairway in carts, the forecaddie gathers the needed yardage and aim points for each player. And then off he runs again.

Speed golf is a whole different game. The object is to play eighteen holes in the shortest amount of time and the least number of strokes. I like running for exercise, but the only time I run on the golf course is to the bathroom or up a hill to see where a blind shot finds its place of rest.

In the first-century culture, you might see children running, but you would never see a Middle Eastern man run. To run, a man must pull up his tunic, exposing his bare legs. This was considered both humiliating and shameful.

This is important information when reading the parable of the prodigal son. First, the son demands his father give him half of the inheritance, essentially saying, "you're dead to me now" to his face. After he squanders it all, the son realizes the only place he'll be fed is as a hired servant back with his father. With his speech in his back pocket, he sets off to return home.

While still a distance away from the homestead, the son sees a figure running toward him. Soon he recognizes his father with his tunic pulled up and bare legs kicking up the dust. The son attempts to give his speech, but the father embraces him and calls to his servants to prepare a party: the best robe, a ring, and shoes on his son's feet. The fattened calf is killed and prepared. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (vs. 24).

The father took on his son's humiliation and shame. The father restored his son to a right relationship with himself. And the father celebrated!

Our Heavenly Father does the same for us. He waits on the threshold and scans the horizon, always looking for his children (you and me). It is never too late to return. Our Father deems us worthy and runs to us.

He doesn't see our sin; he sees Jesus in us. He doesn't make us beg; he raises us. He embraces us and shows compassion.

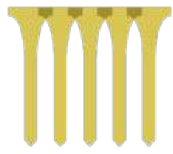
Prayer: Lord, thank you for running toward me. Please help me to turn back to you to receive your embrace and compassion.

—

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Look What The Lord Has Done!

Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind! (Psalm 66:5, NIV)

Who likes to listen to the gory or glorious details of your round of golf? As in genuinely wants to hear you dissect an 82. In adulthood, my dad was probably the one person who hung on every word and asked follow-up questions, often lamenting (or boasting!) that he'd done the same.

For some groups, the post-round breakdown in the grill room is the highlight of the day, and understandably so!

What if we were as eager to talk about what God is doing in our lives as much as our "sandy" from a plugged lie?

I've been humming the song Look What The Lord Has Done all week. If you're unfamiliar with this classic, do a quick Google search and watch a few music videos. You'll be tapping your foot and bouncing around in no time. It's an instant mood-changer. The kind of praise song that gets down in your bones. Why?

Because, as believers, we can't help but rejoice when we think about our Savior! The Psalmist captures it best by writing, "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts." (Psalm 105:1-2, NIV)

As Christians, we don't believe in crazy coincidences. We don't buy into blind luck. We believe in the supernatural, the spirit-guided, and the miraculous. When God opens a bolted door; when He meets a need; when He heals – it must be shared!

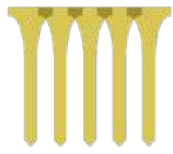
Not in a boastful way, of course. But instead, pointing solely to the King, the Way Maker, the God of miracles.

My friends, look what the LORD has done! In our finances, our careers, and our families.

After Jesus healed the demon-possessed man in Luke 8, he told him, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." Remember, your encouraging anecdote might be what someone needs to hear TODAY to point them toward Jesus!

PRAYER - Father God, we thank you for the awesome opportunity to share the Good News!

Beth Ann Nichols
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Encouraged In Waiting

For the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Habakkuk 2:3 ESV

In the wake of hurricane Ian, the LPGA Tour postponed the second stage of the LPGA Q-series by two weeks. While not a life and death situation or total loss of one's possessions, such a decision causes a ripple effect, especially for the 179 competitors. While travel changes might be a nuisance, the players had to renegotiate their physical and mental preparation. Sometimes waiting for what is to come is the hardest thing.

Today, the 179 female professionals play their first round of the 2022 Second Stage of the Q-series. They hope to earn a spot in the final Q-series stage in December, where eight more rounds will be played for a coveted LPGA Tour Card. A failure to attain status means a year-long wait to try again.

A technologically advanced society turns its nose up to the idea of waiting. We have been groomed for instant results and immediate feedback. We tend to blame social media, but really our need for life to move fast has been in motion for a long time. Getting off the hamster wheel of life is hard. A struggle I know all too personally.

The stories in the scriptures tell a different kind of relationship with time. There was a lot of waiting, and not short waits either.

Noah waited forty days and nights floating in a giant sea of water. Abraham and Sarah waited decades for Isaac. Joseph waited years on multiple occasions to be lifted out of harm. Moses waited forty years in the desert before God appeared in the burning bush.

The Israelites waited forty years to enter the promised land, a two-week journey away. David waited for his kingship for fifteen years. The Prophets waited...and waited...and waited for God's people to listen.

Mary waited for nine months in wonder for the fulfillment of Jesus' birth. Jesus waited for thirty years before he began his three-year walk toward the cross.

While we run through life, we are ultimately waiting too. We are waiting for Jesus' return along with countless daily needs: a new job, an expectant birth, the last days of life, a restored relationship, a return to health, a celebration, someone to change, a vacation, more finances, community, a new season, or you fill in the blank.

As I ponder what I am waiting for, I am reminded to wait with intentionality.

- Do the work God has appointed you to do (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7)
- Seek wisdom (Colossians 4:5-6)
- Be steadfast in prayer (Luke 18:1)
- Be generous (2 Corinthians 9:11)
- Be comforted (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)
- Experience joy (Colossians 1:11)

May we all be encouraged that in our waiting, God is near.

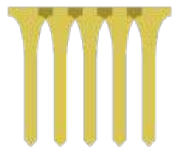
Prayer: Lord, as I reflect on what I am waiting for, I ask your Holy Spirit to lead and guide me to wait with intentionality. Thank you for your presence during the wait.

—

Tracy Hanson

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Through Example of Faith

Remember that at that time, you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12, NIV)

It is a delight to play golf, especially in the middle of a good round. But then you catch up to the group ahead of you, and they are S.....L.....O.....W. You keep thinking that they will call you up on the next hole or maybe even step aside and let you play through. But, alas, they either smile and wave, ignore you completely or give you the evil eye.

Many slow players have no idea they are slow. No idea! They even complain about slow players to others because they know there are slower players on the course than themselves. We have all seen it. If you are not sure you are a slow player, ask the group standing in the fairway behind you with their hands on their hips.

And sadly, that is the condition of many in the world regarding their spiritual state. We delude ourselves into thinking we are not sinners, separated from God, and condemned already, as John 3:18 tells us.

We can easily find others that are not nearly as good as we are, who do not give to charities, don't help their neighbors, or aren't generous with their families. It is easy to look around and find people who are not as good as us.

The problem with this approach to goodness is that it measures our standing before God by comparing ourselves with other people like us—sinners. Instead, we should measure our life against the commandments of God.

The truth is that no one gets into heaven by "good works." God does not grade us relative to another person. He uses a pass/fail system, and Jesus is the Father's standard. Jesus said in John 14:6b, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

Years ago, at the funeral of my pastor, a man with the gift of evangelism told a true story. My pastor had finished playing the front nine with his foursome, and they had gone into the men's grill to grab refreshments between nines.

A fellow yelled mockingly across a packed room, "Hey, Preacher, you still preaching about hell?" Without missing a beat, he loudly hollered back, "Sure am. You still going there?"

We must recognize that we are lost before we can be saved—to know we need salvation. The book of Romans spends the first two and a half chapters telling us the bad news: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his (God’s) sight by observing the law [doing good works]; rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.” Romans 3:20.

But keep reading! The following two-and-a-half chapters of Romans tell us the good news (the Gospel). “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:22, 23)

When these twin realities finally dawn on us that we are sinners and that salvation is offered freely through faith in Jesus Christ, we should humble ourselves, admit we are sinners and ask Jesus to forgive and transform us.

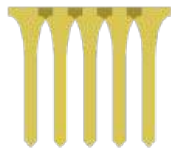
This is what our Links Fellowships are all about. Living out our faith in the world allows others to see a different way of living. Possibly a way of life that never occurred to them as possible. Christians are called ‘peculiar’ people, set-apart people, people different from the world (because of Christ).

So “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

Prayer: Father God, please give me holy boldness in sharing you, the world's hope, through my words and lifestyle

—

Cheryl Martin
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Ambassadors of Christ

Be Prepared to Give an Answer (1 Peter 3:14)

A few years ago, on a beautiful autumn day, I had a full schedule of golf lessons lined up on the practice tee. My last student for the day was a woman in her early sixties whose husband had gifted her beginner golf lessons in the hopes that they could enjoy the game together.

On this day, she was coming in for one of her final lessons. She and I tended to engage in friendly chatter during our lessons, so I always made sure to schedule her last, ensuring that we had some extra time together.

However, I couldn't help but notice that at each lesson, she was struggling to make significant progress. It became apparent that she hadn't been practicing the techniques we were working on with her swing, and it seemed like she didn't particularly enjoy golf.

Nonetheless, as she arrived at the lesson tee, she greeted me with her usual kindness, ready to give the swing another try.

About five minutes into the lesson, she suddenly burst into tears. While this might have caught me off guard in other circumstances, after spending twenty-five years on the lesson tee, it wasn't the first time I had the privilege of helping someone unburden themselves and share their heart. I have always found the lesson tee to be a sacred space on holy ground.

Without hesitation, I prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit to discern what was happening in her heart and how the Lord wanted me to help her. Through her tears, she confessed that she no longer had the will to live and that the only reason she had been coming to finish her lessons was because she enjoyed our conversations.

As she shared her deeply personal story with me (a privilege she had entrusted me with), I was reminded that God calls us to always be prepared to minister to one another, just as Saint Paul urged the Galatians, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)."

Here was this beautiful woman, blessed with a loving husband, children, and grandchildren, materially well-off yet spiritually poor and suffering greatly. She needed Jesus. As she poured her heart out to me, I poured out Jesus to her.

Isn't this our mission as Links Players? As ambassadors of Christ, entrusted with fulfilling the Great Commission, we are called to share Christ and to be ready to provide an answer for the hope we have in

Christ, just as Saint Peter encouraged, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

You may be reading this devotional right now and have experienced a similar situation like this where someone shared their heart and burdens with you during a round of golf. Or perhaps you have encountered someone seeking hope in a fellowship gathering.

Alternatively, you might be the one currently suffering in the depths of despair, maintaining a smile on your face like the sweet woman who reluctantly attended golf lessons. Perhaps it is time for you to share your burdens with a trusted individual.

I would encourage you to find a local Links Players Fellowship near you or, better yet, reach out to one of our directors.

At Links Players, we aim to facilitate a change in the conversation at golf clubs and courses, shifting the focus from surface matters to matters of substance, from self to caring for others, and from temporal concerns to eternal ones. This transformation takes place through a ministry of presence.

Today, be present for someone. Embrace the role of a Links Player at your club, allowing the love of Christ to shine through you as you share hope, provide solace, and walk alongside those in need.

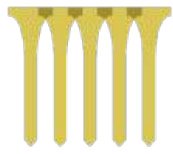
Prayer: "Lord, help us to be present for your people."

—

Meredith Kirk

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Quietness In The Uncomfortable

But the righteous shall live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2:4b, ESV)

“Trevis, I need to feel my hands high on my backswing and my right foot planted on the ground through impact.” I laced four six-irons down the range and looked back at him. “Those swings were so good,” he said. “It feels uncomfortable and hard to commit to, especially under pressure on the course,” I quipped.

Throughout the US Senior Women’s Open, I hit many good shots. I also propelled the ball in many unwanted directions. Standing on the range with Trevis, I decided to commit to these two swing feelings for Sunday...regardless of the results.

I, like most golfers, often say, “I need to have faith in my swing.” Then one lousy shot sends me grasping for something new to focus on. The downward spiral follows. My attitude turns sour, and my anger leaks out. My demeanor can disintegrate in moments.

The Hebrew word for faith in our passage today can also be accurately translated as faithfulness—the righteous shall live by faithfulness. What is the difference between faith and faithfulness?

Billy Graham says, “In the Bible, “faith” means believing in God, and in what Christ has done for us to make our salvation possible—and then committing ourselves to Him.” Faithfulness is “committing ourselves to him.” Faithfulness is putting that unflinching loyalty to God into practice regardless of extenuating circumstances.

One central theme in the book of Habakkuk is how God can use an evil nation such as Babylon for his divine purpose. That would test anyone’s faith. Habakkuk complains to God twice, and God responds with a vision. Habakkuk may not have fully understood God’s mysterious ways, but he did conclude that “the righteous shall live by his faithfulness,” especially when God seems slow to show up.

A couple of questions poking me as I think about faith and faithfulness are: 1) Is my faith in Jesus getting battered by the ways of the world and my disappointment in humanity? 2) Does my life reflect faithfulness to God (consistent introspection that leads to growth in character, values, and loyalty to God)?

I recently heard a Jewish Rabbi say, “When we get too comfortable, we tend to lose our faithfulness. When we are uncomfortable, we are more faithful.” I know I’m not paying attention when my golf

swing gets too comfortable. The same is true in our spiritual lives. We must remain attentive, be humble, and renew our loyalty to God. Habakkuk found quietness in the uncomfortable and was moved toward rejoicing.

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places” (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

On Sunday at the Senior Women’s Open, when a lousy shot slipped in, I didn’t waver, and I remained faithful to my two thoughts. I walked away, rejoicing.

Are you living by your faith and by your faithfulness?

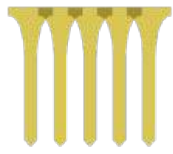
Prayer: Lord, Father, thank you for being faithful to us. Please help us consistently practice living our lives by faithfulness to you. Do your work in us and then through us.

—

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No Room For Neglect

There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens. (Ecclesiastes 3:1, NIV)

What is it that you love to practice? Golfers typically practice what they're good at, especially when time is limited.

And yet, play this game for a little while, and it becomes painfully apparent that it takes a certain level of competence in each area of the game to reach any level of success. One can't simply hit drivers all day. Or never leave the putting green. Or spend all our time desperately trying to avoid bunkers.

It takes a well-balanced game to enjoy long-term success. And the same can be said in life. Do we frequently assess the various dimensions of our lives as often as we are found evaluating our golf games?

In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon speaks to God's plan for all of us and His perfect timing. Everything in this passage represents the ebb and flow of life—the balanced life. There's a time to tear down and a time to build; a time to plant and uproot.

How balanced is your life regarding your physical, mental, social, and spiritual lives? Is work taking priority over family? Is golf encroaching on work? Are the kids getting the attention they need? Are the pursuits of pleasure overtaking times set apart for Sunday worship?

If one area is being neglected, it can bring down the whole house in a flash. How often has a cold putter sent shivers through the rest of your bag?

And it can change month to month, just like our golf games. One month, you can't miss a fairway. The following month, a two-way miss baffles the mind and discourages the heart.

One month you're soaring at work but neglecting relationships at home. Achieving balance takes consistent and honest self-evaluation, and it's the only way to be as effective as possible for Kingdom work.

Here's the excellent news: We know where to find the strength to stand firm when one area is under attack!

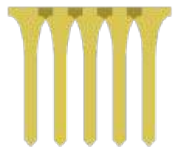
“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.” (2 Thess. 2:16-17)

PRAYER: Father God, thank you for giving us all the tools we need to live a balanced life. __

Beth Ann Nichols

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Waiting in Silence

For God alone, my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. (Psalm 62:1 ESV)

“Do you mind if I play music?” asked one of my pro-am partners. I shrugged my shoulders, deeming myself neutral to the idea while silently screaming yes, I do mind. Golf has become a “noise zone.” The norm is now to hear music echoing out of carts at our local courses.

Noise. It’s all around us. Music...podcasts...cell phone beeps...incoming email dings. Radio. TV. Devotionals (yes, even this one). Google. Noise is fueled by outside sources and from within our minds.

When it comes to my golf swing, I have a monkey mind. My internal chatter analyzes, questions, and rehearses incessantly. During a tournament, I even dream about my swing. Quieting the noise in my mind is one of my biggest battles.

Yet, I also love silence. I can drive for hours in silence. I enjoy the quietness of my home. As an introvert, I need a reprieve of silence after a long day of engaging with people.

Pause for a moment – when was the last time you sat in silence or recognized silence was present? Did you feel uncomfortable? Did you reach for your phone or radio to absorb the quietness?

There are many spiritual disciplines. For example, daily Bible reading and study, writing a gratitude list, daily prayer, generosity, or fasting. The spiritual activity of silence is subtle but has the capacity to make significant changes in a short amount of time. And sitting in silence might be one of the hardest things we can do in our noise-inundated world.

Let’s practice. Stop reading, set a timer for one minute, and sit in silence...

What did you notice? Was it hard? Did a minute like an eternity?

God is not surprised by the noise and distractions of our world. He told his people to take Sabbath – not because he needed it, but because the people (us) needed rest. Jesus found time to retreat into quietness early in the morning for solitude. And, in our passage today, the Psalmist says we will find God when we wait in silence.

Practicing silence creates a quiet space for our souls to engage with God. It is the seedling where the transformation of our minds (thinking and feeling) begins. Practicing silence sharpens our sensitivity to hearing and knowing God's will through the Holy Spirit.

Here are two questions to help practice silence:

What is one habit that you can substitute with a time of silence? Example: Instead of listening to music while you drive to work or the golf course, drive in silence.

What do you need to help create a new habit of practicing silence? Example: Schedule a time in your day on your calendar or set the alarm to remind you to pause for silence during the day.

Practicing silence means no input, no music, and no Bible. Just you and the Holy Spirit. Start with small increments and build. Your soul is worth the time.

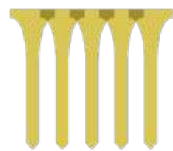
Prayer: Lord, help us today to consider the practice of silence. Show us how to make small changes in our day to turn off the noise and find rest with you.

—

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When “Thy Will Be Done” Becomes A Way Of Life

The Rules of Golf have received a facelift in recent years. Few subjects in the game get folks talking more than a good rules kerfuffle. One rule that hasn't been changed but ranks high on the list for many is that a perfectly struck shot can settle down in the confines of a divot, and absolutely nothing can be done about it.

Our 7-month-old Golden Retriever is named Divot! He likes to plow the earth around my hydrangeas.

It's not uncommon for believers to feel like they've done everything right – pulled the right club, executed the shot – and still drew a bad lie. How is that fair?

My husband and I recently received a long-awaited answer to prayer (more on that another time!). There were many heartaches along the way. Many trials and many lessons. I wanted to write a Facebook post detailing part of the testimony and sent an early version of my writing to a friend who was central to the story. I asked for her permission and feedback.

In her response, she asked if I wanted to add that we had to be open to however God chose to make it happen. In other words, that we had surrendered to his will. It was a wise edit!

How many of us have memorized what's called The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV), in which Jesus instructs the disciples in how to pray?

“This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

I confess that I haven't always prayed “Your will be done.” Many times, in fact, I've prayed for what I wanted and asked God to make it happen my way. But not this time.

For years, my husband and I prayed for his will to be done. And throughout the process, we asked for God to reveal the steps he wanted us to take. We prayed for peace. We prayed for wisdom. We prayed diligently about the details.

In Psalm 37:4 (NIV), David writes, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

To delight in someone is to know them well. When we know God well, our desires begin to mirror his desires.

Sometimes the divots of life are there to strengthen us. Sometimes they are part of the plan.

But sometimes, we've done everything our way. Prepared our way. Executed shots our way. And then asked God to bless our way. Simply put: We put ourselves in the divot.

It's important to know the difference!

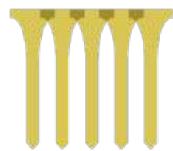
PRAYER: Father God, we thank you for forgiving us of the times we kept you out of our plans. We desire for your will in all things. We give you all the glory!

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Having a Life Strategy

Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established. (Prov. 16:3, ESV)

The game of golf involves many aspects, with strategy being particularly important yet often overlooked. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, strategy means skillfully planning and managing. Even though you might swing the club perfectly, it won't matter much if you don't have a well-thought-out plan for each shot and how you'll tackle the whole course.

Smart golfers consider crucial details like distance, pin placement, weather variables, and other course challenges even before they tee off. Not having a clear plan on the golf course can lead to frustration, struggling with obstacles, and finding yourself in difficult situations.

Similarly, in life, without a clear plan, you can feel lost, confused, insecure, sad, and even hopeless. The Bible is clear that God does have a plan for us: "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good, not for harm, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, ESV).

From before the time you were born, God has carefully planned your life journey: "You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed" (Psalm 139:16 ESV). This knowledge is truly reassuring, knowing that God has everything planned for us, day by day.

With this awesome knowledge that God in His divine providence has planned every step for us in our life journey here on earth, how do we figure out our life's strategy if we do not know it? Are you needing a sense of direction in your life?

The best place to discover your life strategy is submitting your heart, mind, and will to God. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

By keeping your heart and mind focused and submitted to the Lord every day, you can move through life confidently and peacefully. You can rest in his will, knowing that God knows what you need in every situation—"Your heavenly Father knows all your needs, and he will give you everything you need from day to day if you live for him and make his kingdom your primary concern" (Matthew 6:33).

If we know that God has planned every part of life, that he is the creator of our life's course (he already has our strategy for us), that his plans are good, and that he loves us and will provide everything we need day-by-day, then seeking his advice for every decision, just like every shot in golf, becomes crucial.

His daily guidance helps us avoid hazards. Like on the golf course, God already knows the challenges we face, he sees our course in life and has already ordained our days to achieve his purposes according to his will. He is the skilled course designer who goes before us and follows us through our life (Psalm 139:5).

So, if you are struggling today on your 'course in life', take some time to quiet your heart and mind and spend time in the presence of God. Commit to this daily and simply ask for His help, wisdom, and direction. Watch his promises over your life blossom as you submit to him and step onto the paths that he is directing you to.

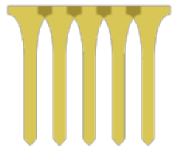
Prayer: "Lord, as we submit and seek you, let us trust in your strategic plan for our lives."

—

Meredith Kirk

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A CHILD'S GIFT

Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3-4 ESV

Exhausted after finishing my third round at the USGA Senior Women's Open, I sat at the corner table in the dining area in a daze. My internal rumination churned over my putting disaster. Feeling defeated, I willed myself to engage in the conversation around me. I was there but not there.

Out of the corner of my eye, two people were approaching our table. Glancing to my right I saw a young boy in a blue polo shirt and wide eyes barely visible under his golf hat. He had something white in his hand and with his dad guiding him from behind, he headed straight for me.

"Miss Hanson, can I have your autograph? You played with my teacher today," he sheepishly asked.

His innocence and sincerity snapped me out of my pity party.

"Of course, what's your name?" "Charley," he smiled. I signed a little white napkin for him, and his gratitude boosted my spirit.

Charley didn't care about my score from the day. He wanted to meet me, the golfer he watched and who played with his teacher. Charley gave me a dose of his child-like spirit and humility in that moment.

One day the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven? (Matthew 18:1)," While they were stuck in the center of their egos, Jesus calls over a child. Can you imagine what the disciples were thinking? Maybe it was something like, "Why is he wasting time on a child?"

Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. The Greek word translated for turn is strepho and means "inward turning (CWSB Dictionary)." This isn't about conversion to a religion. Jesus is telling his disciples to turn away from their sin of self-seeking ambition to be the greatest. It is not what we do, how we perform, or who we impress that opens the gates of heaven.

What are we to learn? To humble oneself like a child does not mean we are less than another person. All people have equal value. Rather, it means lift others up, have a modest opinion of oneself, behave in an unassuming manner, and let go of self-importance.

Charley's humility reminded me that my value is not in my score (I'm still a work in progress on that one). He came to me for an autograph and his joy was a gift to me in return. And I dare say little Charley turned my focus back to Jesus and the faces surrounding me. Now that is kingdom living!

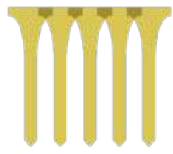
Prayer: Lord, help us to turn our hearts and minds back to you today. Teach us to live from a heart of humility.

--

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Learning Contentment

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Philippians 4:12, NIV)

Lately, the press—on TV, on social media, and now in the courtroom— have made quite a deal about the new Saudi tour and the rift that has arisen with the PGA.

The issue is multifaceted, but it keeps coming back to money. Of course, the “love of money” is not restricted to professional golfers— LIV or PGA Tour players. Maybe I'm aware because I struggle with greed myself; it is one of the planks in my eye.

The Bible has twice as many verses about money as it does about faith or about prayer. The Lord knows our hearts and how much we will struggle with the temptations that money will bring to our lives.

1 Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” The preceding verse states, “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.”

Who or what will your master be? “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

This passage tells us that the love of money is a problem for both the believer and the unbeliever. For the unbeliever, money becomes an idol—the caretaker and answer for all of life’s problems. Many people presume that, with enough money, they won’t have needs, that money can solve all one’s troubles. But God’s word tell us, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be”(Luke 12:34). Money and the pursuit of it can blind us to our need for a Savior.

For the believer, money often remains a temptation. We must understand that if something is green, then it is God’s. He is the giver of every perfect gift. We are only the stewards. “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18). God raises up, and he deposes. And we learn valuable lessons about both the Lord and ourselves as we are elevated and deflated.

Who or what will your master be? “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

The great news is that we can learn to be content. From Philippians 4:12, Paul explained that he had learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. That discovery says to me that contentment in all circumstances is not a natural thing. It must be learned. Our Lord is the perfect teacher, and he uses the hands-on method for most of us.

Paul's contentment grew over time. It did not come quickly, nor did it not come easily. However, contentment did come. By God's grace, it can be the same for you and me today. Let us make more of the blessings in our lives than we do of the difficulties. Let our focus be on the Lord and not on our circumstances.

Let us lean into the Lord Jesus. The secret that Paul found was “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Let us do all things in his strength and not in our own.

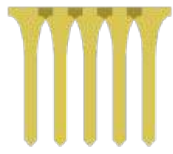
Prayer: Father God, in Jesus' name, show me the greed in my heart so that I may learn to be content in you

—

Cheryl Martin

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In Spirit and In Truth

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4: 23-24 ESV

“We are impressive, Andre! Ready fifty minutes ahead of schedule.” After two nights of camping, we packed the car, cleaned the campsite, and set off to explore Baxter State Park.

I set up the basic parameters for our Maine trip but did not plan each day in detail. This is unlike me. I like to have a plan and stick to the program. Andre is the opposite. “I’m flexible and up for whatever,” he responded when I asked him what he wanted to do.

We drove north on the coastal highway on the first day. A surprise lunch led to red Adirondack chairs eating under the blue sky and looking at the water. We landed in Acadia National Park on day two. The woman at the visitor center suggested a hike up Cadillac Mountain. A walk up the north ridge and down the south bank transpired. Vistas of the harbors, the Pacific Ocean, and the mountaintops speckling the horizon left us in awe.

As we approached Baxter State Park, Mount Katahdin consumed the sky in front of us. The 200,000-acre park provided a framework for us to worship the Creator in his creation. Andre’ picked South Turner Mountain, 3,200 vertical feet in two miles that left our legs shaky and tired. Every step was worth it and felt Spirit-led.

Jesus lived his life within a framework – the Torah teachings (Truth) and his Father’s leading (Spirit). But he was not rigid nor bound by man-made laws and religiosity. He often stopped and welcomed those in his path along his intended routes, even when it meant a delay on his journey.

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Spirit and Truth work together with fluidity and offer the framework of true worship to our Father.

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One such moment happened when Jesus headed back to Galilee on the unexpected route through Samaria instead of around Samaria. The disciples would have had concerns; this didn’t fit their plan.

It was here, with a Samaritan woman, that Jesus announced that true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and truth. Why did he say this, and why in Samaria?

The Jews equated true worship only happening in Jerusalem. The Samaritans worshiped on the same mountain as Jacob. Jesus declares it's not about the place but the who. God desires to be worshiped in spirit, with a sincere mind, with a true heart, not with mere external rites. And he demands truth, where our words and conduct declare the existence and will of the one true God.

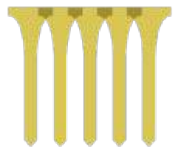
Worshiping God is sacred. Sometimes a specific plan enhances our worship, and it's okay to leave room to worship in spirit. Spirit and Truth work together with fluidity and offer the framework of true worship to our Father.

Prayer: Lord, help us seek sweet moments to worship you in spirit and truth.

Tracy Hanson

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A Cry For Mercy

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:36, NIV)

By now, you've probably seen the viral video of the Oklahoma Little League batter at a regional playoff game in Texas who gets hit in the head by a wild pitch and then walks over to console the pitcher. It made national news. One clip of the moment was viewed 22.5 million times on Twitter.

Why did this touch so many people?

Because we need more mercy in this world.

This little boy could've been angry that he'd been hit. He could've been caught up in the moment, thinking and worrying only about himself. Maybe, he might look for sympathy and adoration from the crowd.

Instead, he saw a peer on the opposing team in deep, emotional pain and walked over to the mound to say, "Hey, you're doing great. Let's go."

In Matthew 25:34-40, we find a parable from Jesus on how to show mercy to those in need:

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

The young batter reminds us that emotional hurt can be just as painful as the physical and that sometimes it's the injured who must show mercy.

How can we show mercy to friends and strangers alike in the heat of battle? How can we be more tenderhearted toward those who hurt us – intentionally or not?

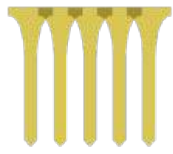
PRAYER: Father God, forgive us of all the times we knowingly walk past a need. Forgive us of the times we'd rather make someone who hurt us feel worse than tell them, "It's OK."

—

Beth Ann Nichols

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Trust in Truth

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32, NIV)

No lack of advice is available to golfers in search of a better game. Every day we can view instructional videos and internet opinion pieces or find someone around to offer personal advice about our game.

We ignore most of these tips but still wonder what it might take to get better. Most of us decide we need to seek help from someone we trust who knows what they are talking about. An expert teacher would be our most trusted source if we can find one.

This same truth applies to our life as well. If we really want to know how to live a Christ-honoring life, we should seek an expert who knows more than we do. It makes sense to seek the wisdom of the One who made us.

God, who knew us before we were born, seeks our best good. How can we find him? In truth, he finds us. He places people and situations in our path to cause us seek him. These events will remind us we are not in control and desperately need to find the one who is.

The Holy Spirit draws us to God and presents us with unavoidable truth. We will learn we are separated from God and need to be reconnected to him. The Spirit reveals that he has made a way for that connection to happen through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus.

The only requirement on our part to access the God of the universe is to trust in his Son, Jesus. We don't need money, power, talent, or effort to be righteous. We simply need to trust in the finished work of Jesus.

We can run after help in a lot of different ways, but truth can only be found in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When we trust in him, we will know the truth, and it will free us to live a righteous life.

We can search the ends of the earth to find the truth about who and what we are, but the answer to the most important question is neither at the end of the earth nor in the mind of a great human teacher.

God's saving grace is the greatest truth of all. It remains free for all who will receive it. This beacon of light will help us sort out everything else we need to know about being human.

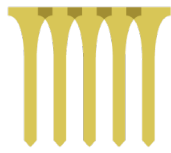
Prayer: Father, help us to trust that you know what is best for us and that we are only truly free to be our best self when we are connected to you.

—

Linda Ballard

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Endurance [Perseverance]

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. (Romans 5:3-4)

The 2024 US Open at Pinehurst No. 2 tested the patience and endurance of the best players in the world. Exhaustion walked players away from the eighteenth green. Every hole was a grind of narrow fairways and pin-point greens.

The Greek word for endurance, hupomone, translates “to persevere, remain under, and patience.” Bryson DeChambeau played the seventy-second hole with hupomone.

His poor tee shot left him with no backswing and his ball against a tree root. Bryson punched his ball to one of the toughest shots in golf, a fifty-five-yard greenside bunker shot. Needing an up and down to win, Bryson remained patient. He hit an unbelievable bunker shot and then made a three-foot par putt for victory.

In a Golf Digest article, Joel Beall wrote about Bryson’s final round, “For the better part of five hours, it wasn’t smooth, and it was far from easy. It was simply the performance of stubborn will and conviction that comes from the countless hours of work and dreams and disappointment, a cost that can never be measured and a price only he knows he paid.”

Suffering produced endurance.

In his own words, Bryson commented, “I’ve realized that there’s a lot more to life than just golf. Treating others, first and foremost respecting yourself, is super important to be able to treat others with respect, as well. That’s one of the big things that I’ve learned. I’m not perfect. I’m human. Everyone’s human. Certainly, those low moments have helped establish a new mind frame of who I am, what’s expected, what I can do and what I want to do in my life. To answer your question quite frankly, what have I learned? Having the right people around you.”

Endurance produced character.

Endurance doesn’t develop quickly. It requires naming our suffering, lamenting, grieving, and asking God to teach us. And then we participate with God in the process.

It may take many cycles of suffering to produce endurance before character growth sprouts. And sometimes it remains far off, maybe never. Raising the white flag of surrender might feel easier than pressing on.

I don't know if Bryson has faith in Jesus, but like him, we need the right people around us as we journey through suffering, which produces endurance and character. We can't do it alone.

On the "Being Known Podcast with Curt Thompson and Pepper Sweeney, S9E7: Perseverance," a few applications were given on perseverance. I think they are helpful to us today, too.

"Make a list of the areas of your life in which you sense needing to persevere."

"Which of these items have you feeling overwhelmed and not wanting to persevere?"

"Consider sharing with someone you trust about these areas and begin to practice monitoring how you sense your life changing when you allow others to join you in your work of perseverance."

Prayer: Lord, help me grow in endurance that produces character. I need you and others on my journey.

—

Tracy Hanson

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