

**CAREER
FAMILY
COMMUNITY
HEALTH**

faith

in the arenas of life

a Bible study for individuals and groups from Links Players International

faith in the arenas of life

is intended as a study for Links Fellowships and other Bible study groups or by individuals. It is one of many resources available at no cost from Links Players International.
www.linksplayers.com

©2013 Links Players International

Study authored by Jeff Hopper,
based on the white paper “The 7 C’s to Your Work-Life Harmony,” by Greg Hurley

Copies of this study may be printed and distributed at no charge beyond the simple printing costs. The study is designed to be printed on standard letter-sized paper.

Those who would like a printed, comb-bound copy of this study may receive one for \$5, including shipping. Please email us at linksplayers@linksplayers.com.

Scripture quotations in this study are the paraphrase of the study author or are quoted directly from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.
All rights reserved.

**Five-minute video introductions for each of the lessons in this study are available at: www.linksplayers.com/Bible_Studies/FaithintheArenas/faithinthearenas.html.
Ready for viewing online and available for order as a single DVD.**

Note to Links Fellowship or small group leaders: There are 10 lessons in this study. As with other Links Players small group materials, the lessons here may span one or more sessions, depending on the intensity and length of discussion in your group. You may wish to print the full package to give to your participants, or just print one lesson at a time.

Because so many Links Fellowships are made up of participants of all levels of biblical background, you’ll find that these lessons will challenge those who know their Bibles well but will not leave inquirers or new believers behind. However, you will want to be sensitive to the needs of those who don’t know their Bibles as well, perhaps even showing them how to look up chapters and verses to get started.

At the end of this study you will find a personal commitment form, which may be a springboard for another lesson and a great way for your participants to pray for one another as they look to apply what they have learned.

faith in the arenas of life

INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE GREAT PLEASURES IN GOLF COMES through the variety of playing fields. Tennis, basketball, soccer, baseball—sports like these are all played on courts or fields of the same size. But in golf, the “field” and its commensurate challenges change regularly. Even the same golf course can play quite differently day-to-day according to the placement of the tees and the hole locations. No wonder you hear tour pros speak of “playing the golf course” instead of focusing on their fellow competitors!

The constant in golf, then, is the golfer. Golfers bring to each round their own set of skills, their temperament, their expectations, and their preparation. No matter the challenges of a particular course, golfers are never equipped beyond what they bring. They must work within the parameters of their own game and find ways to employ their “go-to” shots as often as possible.

Life is very similar to golf. It is lived in many arenas. Your day may move from the bedroom to the kitchen to the car to the office to the gym to the dinner table in such a routine that you don’t pay attention much any more. But each of these places sees something different in you and asks something different from you.

We could be tempted to say here that the one constant is you. You move from this spot to the next. You present yourself as people know you in each place.

But we all know the horror stories of such fragmented living gone wrong. A man, thinking he is anonymous when away from home, strikes up a conversation with another woman at a bar on the way home from work. There is a charge behind the conversation, though, a “sexual energy” that turns the man from faithful to adulterous. Or a woman,

setting aside the ripples that will bring down her marriage and family, closes the door of her office and reworks the books to benefit her bank account.

When we alone are the thread of our lives, we make choices in the moment, like a golfer reacting rashly to the troubles before him, rather than picking a target and relying on the firm fundamentals of a good swing. In life, too, we need fundamentals. We need something greater than ourselves to help us move from arena to arena in a consistent commitment to integrity, excellence, and service. That thread, that glue, that constant is faith.

Faith in our modern vernacular can mean two things. First, it may be the sum of our doctrines. This is what we mean when we say, “You must stay committed to the faith.” Second, it may be the quality we use to adhere to those doctrines. This is what we mean when we say, “Your faith is what keeps you connected to God.”

In this study, we will look at how placing your faith in Jesus Christ is meant to change your life, not just in one moment or one place, but moving through every arena of life. When you truly understand who he is and what he has done for you (“the faith”), you will find great strength in leaning on him (“your faith”) at home, at work, and in your community.

You will be led through Scripture reading, discussion questions, and the personal observations of our “narrator,” Greg Hurley. Greg is a friend of Links Players and a Certified Financial Planner. Like others in his profession, he wrote a white paper to create a niche for his expertise and to drive business. As Greg puts it, “In the end, I got no niche and no business, but the process changed my life forever.” This white paper was the basis for the study on which you are about to embark.

Whether you have recently started your walk with Christ or you are well down the path, “Faith in the Arenas of Life” should provide meaningful assistance in ordering and maintaining the highest priorities of living, with Christ at the forefront. We’re glad you’ve chosen to embark on this study.

— Jeff Hopper

Editor, Links Players Publications

LESSON 1

faith in the arenas of life

CHRIST AS KING, PART 1

JESUS FROM THE BEGINNING

As a financial planner, I meet with clients to discuss what we can do with their money to make it work best for them. This results in some very interesting conversations that allow me to assess with my clients what is most valuable in their lives.

It did not take me long to discover that a lot of people struggle with maintaining a healthy balance in their lives. Often, they are multiplying dollars while sacrificing their closest relationships, their health, and even—when it all progresses—their ability to work well and manage others.

This led me to write a white paper for my clients, a resource that in the end I hoped would remind us all what is truly important. The paper featured seven C's: career, children, community, care for parents, cardio, couples, and commitment to faith. Honestly, I left faith for last because not all my clients have that element in their lives and I wanted to win their interest and trust first. Here, though, we are starting with faith, because it is the thread that really orders our lives. And not just any faith, but faith in Jesus Christ, letting him rule all the arenas of our life.

So let's take a look at who Jesus is and what He offers to you and me.

Greg Hurley

AT LINKS PLAYERS, we believe in the strength of God's Word, the Bible, for giving us the insight we need to understand who God is and what He is doing in the world and in the people who live here. For this reason, we will rely heavily on the reading of the Bible itself as we progress through this study. Each lesson will point you toward important passages of Scripture, then encourage thought and discussion. At the end of each lesson, you will also find information about where you can go to find out more about the topics we have been discussing. With that said, let's begin!

DO I NEED GOD?

The first step in considering whether to make Jesus Christ (or Jesus, the Messiah) king of your life is assessing your need for Him. Look at these passages of Scripture, making a short note about the content of each:

Genesis 3:1-13

Exodus 20:1-19

Psalms 51:1-12

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Romans 3:9-20

The First



When we make a commitment to Christ, we place him on the throne of our lives. From here, every other arena falls into place behind him.

COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

According to these passages, what is it that separates us from God’s perfection? Have you ever considered your own sin and how it points you toward your need for restoration with God? Do you have any idea how you would go about this restoration?

THE ROLE OF CHRIST IN BRINGING RESTORATION

Now read these passages and make a note about the content of each:

Romans 3:21-26

Romans 8:1-11

Hebrews 9:11-14 and 9:27-28

John 3:1-21

From these passages, what do you discover about the role of Jesus Christ in overcoming the sin in each of us? How is this different than what you have known or thought of Jesus before?

Now read Acts 2:14-41, which includes the first “evangelistic” message after the resurrection of Jesus. What points about Jesus did Peter emphasize in his sermon? What kind of response does this passage reveal as appropriate to this message of salvation?

LESSON 2

faith in the arenas of life

CHRIST AS KING, PART 2

THE CHANGE IN ME

As my wife Nicole and I prepared to marry, we also talked about raising children. I was going to be the head of the household, leading financially, emotionally, and spiritually. But I recognized that I was unable to initiate these changes by myself.

It was at this point that I recalled some of the teaching I had received in church when I was younger. After 20 years I picked up my Bible and began reading it again. Through my struggles, I came to realize that the promises of Jesus Christ were the answer, and I committed my life to him.

Some might say that religion isn't for them. Well, it's not for me either. What I'm talking about is a close, personal relationship with Jesus. He is my king, but he is also my friend. He has my best interests in mind, even when the principles he has set forth are demanding!

Having Jesus in my life has compelled me to change my philosophy. I don't just "do well" financially for my clients. Now I look to act in their best interests, just as God does for me. Doing business this way requires patience, love, understanding, empathy and learning to communicate at a personal level. I could not do this without Jesus living in me by his Holy Spirit.

Greg Hurley

WHEN PEOPLE CHOOSE THEIR OWN PATH, they also choose their own consequences. A few people are comfortable with this—though they are often those who place the blame anywhere but on themselves. Most of us don't like consequences, because they reveal our ongoing inability to "get it right." But this sort of disappointment is nearly always the beginning of the story for those who turn their hearts to God. They recognize their need for help beyond the advice of a friend or the pages of a book. And when they call on God, they find that he is ready with mercy, salvation, and the redeeming process of turning a confused, failing life into a life of eternal purpose.

GOD'S REDEMPTIVE WORK

Redemption is defined as the exchange of something worthless for something valuable. Athletes speak of "redeeming themselves" by taking motivation from a loss to produce a win the next time out. Spouses similarly speak of "redeeming themselves" by atoning for a mean word or selfish action, often with a nice gift. God is in the business of redeeming for eternity those who place their faith in his Son. Look at these passages, making a note of what they say about a changed position in Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 John 1:8-9

CHANGED HEARTS, CHANGED LIVES

In a court of law, evidence wins the day. The chief source of evidence comes through the direct testimony of those involved. The same is true when we look at what God is doing, for his redeeming work is done in the lives of people. Let's consider two people in the New Testament whose lives were turned inside-out by Jesus.

Peter

Read John 13:33-38; John 18:12-27; John 21:15-19; and Acts 5:27-32 (and review Acts 2:14-38). What highlights do you note in these passages that provide us with a "before and after" of Peter's life with Jesus?

Mary Magdalene

Read John 8:1-11; John 19:25; John 20:1-18. While a direct textual reference is not made, commentators suggest that the woman caught in adultery in John 8 is the Mary of Magdala referred to in these later passages of John. How did Jesus' forgiveness offer Mary a new life? What wonders became hers because she chose to follow him?

Your own story

Where would you say you stand with Jesus today? Do you have a testimony of what he has done in your life? Or are you still "kicking the tires," looking at how the Bible presents him as the Son of God?

BIBLE NOTES

If you need a Bible, they are now available in print, as ebooks, and as mobile apps. We recommend the New International, New King James, or English Standard versions.

OTHER RESOURCES

If you want to examine the person and work of Jesus Christ further, we recommend our study *Jesus: Savior Lord Treasure*, at linksplayers.com (click Resources, then go to Bible studies).

LESSON 3

faith in the arenas of life

FAITH INFUSED

THE PERMEATING DIFFERENCE

I wrote in the last lesson that “having Christ in my life has compelled me to change my philosophy.” Despite our culture’s attempts to make faith something private and isolated, I can’t imagine how that is possible! Either our lives are changed by Christ or they aren’t—and by “lives” I mean everything that we do.

I had three father figures in my life who all mentored me (whether they meant to or not!). Looking back now, though, I am afraid that one thing they taught me is carried in the truth of these words from pastor Greg Waybright: “When we get old, it is what is on the inside that matters.” My three father figures had many things in their possession before they died. But these things really amounted to nothing, because they lacked a personal relationship with Christ. They had not learned to selflessly serve others, and they lived the later part of their lives without any joy. They had made no investment in eternity.

I’ve made a commitment to God to live a life that pleases him. Scripture tells us that we cannot gain salvation by the works we do, but it speaks frequently of the “pleasing aroma” we can offer to God when we live out our faith in honor of him as we go through our days.

Greg Hurley

GREG’S WORDS HIT ON A KEY QUESTION: What effect should my faith have on the other aspects of my life? Certainly if we were given new physical life by an amazing medical procedure (think bone marrow transplant), it would have a profound influence on our life going forward. The same is true for a relationship with Jesus. When he is in us, we are moved to a new kind of living.

REGAL LIVING

In the first lesson, we considered Romans 8:1-11. Let’s look at the ensuing verses, Romans 8:12-17. What does this passage tell you about your relation to Jesus? How would the sinking in of this truth change your approach to life?

Now consider a similar sort of passage in 1 Peter 2:4-10. Again, how would these truths change the way you look at yourself and the way you should live?

As a first step from the passages above, what is one new approach you will take in your life based on thinking of who you are in Christ?

THE ROLE OF AMBASSADORS

At Links Players, we challenge people involved in our Fellowships to take up a five-part mission that looks like this:

L for Love Christ and others (the Great Commandment)

I for Integrate Christ's reign and authority into all of life (living out your faith)

N for Network friends together in Christ (creating fellowship)

K for Kindle compassion for the poor and needy (showing generosity with the heart of Jesus)

S for Sharing the Gospel of Christ through the game of golf (the Great Commission)

While the **I** is certainly the heartbeat behind this entire study, let's focus for a few minutes on the **S**. When we encourage the sharing of the Good News of Jesus, we invoke 2 Corinthians 5:20a: "We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

What are some qualities of a foreign ambassador to another country? How might some or all of these qualities also be appropriate for an ambassador of Christ?

Consider the following passages from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:13-16 and Matthew 6:1-4. How do these seemingly contradictory ideas actually spur a balanced approach in the way we live out our faith?

Now read 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 1 Peter 3:13-16. How do these passages encourage us to live in a way that honors God and draws others to him?

VIDEOS: CALLED TO BE AMBASSADORS

Links Players president Jeffrey Cranford and COO Jeff Hopper have prepared a series of conversations about how we are called by God, especially as it pertains to being his ambassadors. Find these at linksplayers.com by clicking on Resources and following the link to Online Videos.

LESSON 4

faith in the arenas of life

LIVING TO WORK?

CAREER AND SIGNIFICANCE

Clients come to see me because they've made some money on the job and they want to invest it wisely. Because my mom struggled financially when I was growing up, it's now one of my passions to help others make biblically wise financial decisions.

Life is so much more than just your career. The problem with careers is that they often are compartmentalized away from our faith. One can have a career that is God-honoring, but we must remember that we are all called to make disciples who follow Jesus. For you this may mean staying where you are and spreading the Gospel, or doing something entirely different.

As I've talked to executives about their careers, a large majority tell me they are still working because they "want to." They don't need the money and they aren't sure what else to do with themselves. Some say they are working for the security of their children—yet they have no idea how much money that is!

Let me say this plainly from what I've observed: if your career is your top priority, the sense of fulfillment you are looking for from it will never come. Earthly success is fleeting. You're going to need a purpose more significant than your work!

Greg Hurley

THE BIBLE IS NOT SILENT ABOUT WORK. In fact, at the very beginning, when God first interacted with Adam, he gave the man work to accomplish: *Be fruitful. Multiply. Govern the animals* (Genesis 1:28-30). After Adam disobeyed God, the Lord changed the nature of Adam's work so that it became toilsome and demanding. Hundreds of years later the writer of Ecclesiastes (likely King Solomon) spilled many discontented words about work, calling it a "meaningless chasing after the wind."

Most of us tolerate work, because we like the pay that it brings and the lifestyle it affords. Others dream of jobs they'd rather have: angel investor, professional athlete, travel writer.

It's no wonder we think so much about work; it fills a large chunk of our day and a large chunk of our lives. But how do we keep the pursuit of career goals in perspective? How do we let our faith supersede our working ambitions?

A WORKER'S LAMENT

Read Ecclesiastes 2:17-23. Stepping back to evaluate your own career, which of the writer's observations line up with your own?

How does this passage draw a stark line between working for eternal goals and working for earthly goals?



Because our career is often the chief goal of our early adult life, we struggle to view it with godly perspective when other priorities arise.

CAREER

WORK MADE HOLY

We have already considered the role of God as redeemer of lives that are broken. In the same way, God’s pervasive work among us (biblically called his “kingdom”) can redeem arenas of our lives that are broken by the prevailing cultural application. If work in the world runs the gamut from drudgery to self-gratification, where does God enter the picture? How does he redeem work?

Our career should not be our identity • Read Matthew 16:26, Luke 12:15, and Galatians 2:20
Where should our identity be found? How do we make idols of other things?

Our work should honor the Lord • Read Colossians 3:17 and 3:22

What would it look like to do your work with God as your audience and threaded through your decisions?

Our work should focus on eternal treasures • Read Matthew 6:19-24 and Colossians 3:2

What things will last forever? How can we re-order our work with these things in mind?

Our work should make us grateful and generous • Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19 and Ephesians 5:19-20

How can you best express thanks for God’s provision? How can you best share with others?

LESSON 5

faith in the arenas of life

A GREAT MARRIAGE

MY WIFE AND MY LIFE

When Nicole and I were married, my dad offered a toast. He described a blank canvas with vibrant colors and dark ones, too. He said, “May you create a masterpiece together.”

Painting this picture of marital beauty has been one of my life’s goals, but I wish I could say that I have always avoided painting with those dark colors. For one, I have had to be mentored out of my imbalanced life, because I was putting my career ahead of my marriage, family, and Christ. But along the way Nicole and I have both learned valuable lessons about love, respect, honor, patience, forgiveness, tolerance and support—some of the hallmarks of an ideal marriage. We’ve even learned how to argue fairly! (And as a financial planner, I can tell you one point of common contention among couples is money.)

Here’s a choice I’ve made to improve my marriage: I have decided that for the next 20 years, I will read at least one book each year on marriage (and one on parenting). I do plenty of reading to keep up with the trends in the financial industry; I can certainly read what God’s leaders are saying about how to protect my most important earthly commitment—a commitment sealed with vows before God!

Greg Hurley

THOUGH THEY LIVED MILLENNIA AGO, everyone has heard of Adam and Eve. Of course, most everyone has heard of George Washington and Roger Bannister and Neil Armstrong, too. Firsts have a way of getting noticed!

But Adam and Eve’s claim to fame goes far beyond being the first man and woman. In the Bible’s account, they were also the first picture of a married couple—though they didn’t “go to the chapel,” as we say of many wedding partners today.

Look for a minute at how the Bible describes the act of a man marrying a woman, both originally and in Jesus’ affirmation of marriage.

MARRIAGE DEFINED

Read Genesis 2:20b-24. In verse 24, what three aspects of marriage are described?

When Jesus spoke of marriage, it was often via an indirect reference when he was asked about the acceptability of divorce. However, read Matthew 19:1-6. How did Jesus blend words about divorce with a full endorsement of marriage’s original design?



Couples is the first of three C's that envelop family. When our faith is threaded through this arena, life's balance is a far better prospect.

COUPLES

SEXUAL EXPRESSION

Get this: God has no problem with sex. He designed it. But as its designer, he also outlined parameters for sexual activity so that it would exist within its best framework. And that framework is marriage.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:18-19, 1 Thessalonians 4:2-8, and Hebrews 13:4

What boundaries does God place around marriage? What are some ramifications of sex outside of marriage that are completely avoided when we adhere to God's monogamous design?

CARE AND CONCERN

The Bible is not afraid to say that while men and women are equal in the sight of God, they are made differently. It has been wisely written that men thrive on respect and women thrive on love. Read 1 Peter 3:1-7. How was each partner charged by the apostle? What good reasons are given for operating this way?

SPIRITUAL BLESSING

God's greatest concern for our marriage is that we encourage one another in our faith. Read Ephesians 5:21-32. How is earthly marriage presented as a parallel for Christ's relationship with his beloved church?

What is a husband challenged to do? And a wife?

HOME BASE

What arena of your own marriage needs the most attention right now?

LESSON 6

faith in the arenas of life THE NEXT GENERATION

WHAT WE GIVE TO OUR KIDS

When clients come to a financial advisor to shape up their savings and investments, they typically have two things in mind: their own retirement and the welfare of their children. We talk about college plans, wedding finances, and estate planning.

Parents hope that their children will grow up to be strong, independent, and hard-working. Along the way, many parents are willing to provide financial scaffolding to help their children build such lives. But how do you do this without spoiling your children or establishing a sense of entitlement in your children? One avenue to doing this well is to focus on passing on wisdom ahead of wealth.

Still even offering excellent financial wisdom doesn't touch the important work of leading our children spiritually. We've all heard the sad recollections of adults who say that their parents loved them with money alone.

The Bible speaks of a more complete love, where God's people encourage and enrich one another with the way they mentor and love one another. And while the Bible is not written as a manual on parenting, we do well when our actions and our words combine to set an example in the faith for our children.

Greg Hurley

IN THE TIMES AND PLACES OF BIBLICAL CULTURE, children were the great desire of husbands and wives. Barren women desperately sought the Lord's favor (and often found it), and fathers were proud to have children to carry on their lineage. Call this "old fashioned," but children are still high on couples' wish list these days. In fact, couples sometimes spend thousands of dollars to gain fertility or to adopt a child if they cannot have biological children of their own. Our words may not say how much we want children, but our actions sure do!

When children arrive, however, it does not take long for parents to recognize how ill-equipped they are for the 24-hour-a-day demands of children. And because at Links Players, we often work with older adults, we hear frequently the repeated adage: "You never stop being a parent."

But what does the Bible say about parenting? Does God have any instructions for how we are to interact with our children?

A MARK OF EXCELLENCE

Read 1 Timothy 3:4-5, where Paul writes about the qualifications of a church elder. How is our parenting a mark of our maturity?

THE TONE OF PARENTING

Read Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21. How is this thrust important for when our children are both in our home and living beyond it?



Alongside our spouses, God often gives us children to care for and bring up “in the way they should go.” Here’s a chance to love sacrificially.

CHILDREN

GOD’S WAY PASSED ON

From the beginning, God did not intend for his instructions to be to for “adults only.” He knew that we would spend our lifetimes living out his Word, and there is no better time to start than when we are young.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9

When is a good time to talk to your young children or grandchildren about the meaning and practice of our faith? What should we include in those discussions (think biblical stories of faith, theological concepts such as salvation, and moral practices like sexual purity)?

When it comes to our adult children, especially if we did not raise them in the faith, our actions should come before our words. What aspects of your faith do you need to live authentically before your adult children at this time?

GOD AND FAMILY

Read Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 14:25-27. Although Jesus was using hyperbolic language, we cannot miss his strong ordering of our world. When do you tend to put family before faith? How can you establish a more God-leaning order and still demonstrate your love to your children?

CHILDREN AND PRAYER

We do best when we pray first. This is certainly true when it comes to children, since we are all novices at the work. Read Philippians 4:4-7. How might you apply this passage to your parenting and your parental prayers?

LESSON 7

faith in the arenas of life

HONORING YOUR PARENTS

THE OTHER END OF LIFE

In the United States, youth is prized. We turn our eyes to young athletes and young musicians, emphasizing their skill and vitality.

But in other cultures deference begins with the elderly. They are honored for their sacrifice through the years and the wisdom they may offer after witnessing so much. The Bible, too, encourages this respect and care for those who have gone before us, particularly our own parents.

The problem with Americans, however, is not one of belief. In a survey of 75 executives and business leaders over an 18-month period, I found that close to 80 percent of those surveyed considered it important to care for their parents, with a detailed plan and a recognition of the costs being key markers of this care. Yet far fewer knew what care their parents really wanted, and less than 45 percent had a plan in place! There was a gap between understanding and practice.

When God wants us to do something, it is never enough simply to think that it is a "good idea." We need to be stepping out in action, and the more knowledge we have, the more is expected from us. Beginning when our parents are still in good health is great first step!

Greg Hurley

WHAT DOES TRADITION MEAN TO YOU? It's not exactly the highest value in the Western world, where technologies and trends usually make the loudest noise.

But when you move through time or place and land in another culture, you'll find that traditions still carry weight. Couple this with respect for the aged, and you'll recognize that *what has been good* is not to be tossed out in exchange for *what must be better*. There is reason to believe that many things, if they were ever excellent, are still excellent today.

With this in mind, we do well to consider the honor we show our parents in the way that we talk to them, spend time with them, and care for them. And while it is true that this may demand in some cases a significant level of forgiveness, let's do for them as Jesus did with us!

A PRIMER ON PARENT CARE

Read Exodus 20:12. How is it significant that this instruction is part of the Ten Commandments?

Read Ephesians 6:2-3. What part of the original command is emphasized in this passage?

What specific honor and care do your parents currently need in their lives?



When you reach middle age, your parents' needs are often as great as your children's. And God wants us to honor them in helping them.

CARE FOR PARENTS

THE ANCIENT EXAMPLES

In the Old Testament, we find several examples of children honoring and caring for their parents. Let's consider two of these to capture a sense of this caring spirit, which is often far removed from how we conduct this practice today.

Read Genesis 49:29-50:14. What depth of feeling is expressed among family members? How did Joseph and his brothers honor their father Jacob's requests? What sacrifices did this require of them?

Read Exodus 18:1-27. What wise council did Moses receive from his father-in-law, Jethro? How did Moses respond to this counsel? In what specific ways did Moses honor his father-in-law?

JESUS AND PAUL ON CARING FOR PARENTS

Read Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders in Mark 7:9-13. How did Jesus dismiss the leaders' rationalization for not taking care of their parents? How does this passage help us set a balance with Jesus' words in Luke 18:28-30?

Consider this passage from the apostle Paul: 1 Timothy 5:3-8. What do you make of the force of his words? How does this inform the kind of care that you should be giving to your own parents?

LESSON 8

faith in the arenas of life

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

STEPPING OUT FOR THOSE WITH NEED

I'm a big fan of people who have "made it." I don't just mean those who accumulated more money than everyone else. I mean people who have found their calling and put their priorities in order.

Consider Winston Churchill, who rose from political mundanity to lead his nation in its grimmest hour. Or coach John Wooden, a humble leader of college athletes whose teams produced the longest winning streak in college basketball history. You would think that men like these only pushed through because they were focused on their own goals and what they wanted to achieve. Not so.

Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give." And Wooden spoke similarly: "You can't live a perfect day until you do something for someone who will never be able to repay you."

These men understood what Jesus was saying when he told us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Compassion and generosity are fine traits in any man or woman, but they are meant to be hallmarks of God's people. When you realize that your career is not all-important and that Christ is, you can deliberately reallocate your time to helping others.

Greg Hurley

MUCH GOLF ETIQUETTE IS BASED ON THIS principle: care for those playing around you. We don't fix ball marks or rake bunkers for ourselves, but for the next guy, the golfer in the group behind us. In this way, we have a sense of community. In our own group, too, we keep quiet, watch our shadows, and avoid stepping in another's line.

We should be pretty good, then, at taking a look around us and seeing the needs of others. And while we can do this for anyone, the Bible repeatedly compels us to show practical compassion for the unlikeliest recipients: our enemies and those people the rest of society would just as soon dismiss. This is a sacrificial love, just as Jesus delivered to us in his suffering on the cross for our sin.

RELIGION AND REALITY

In the Old Testament, God delivered a very harsh message through the prophet Isaiah, sent in the direction of those who thought their religion was in order. Read Isaiah 58:1-12. How did God express his priority of concern here?

In what way do you think religion still impedes God-hearted concern and advocacy for the neediest people among us? How can we change this as men and women of God?



Contributing to our community challenges us to be regularly involved in two places: among our neighbors and within the body of Christ.

COMMUNITY

TARGETS OF OUR LOVE

In the New Testament, too, we find instruction about where to direct our acts of forgiveness, love, and compassion. We are to demonstrate love to...

- Our friends and family • Read 1 John 4:19-21
Our brothers and sisters in Christ • Read Acts 4:32-35
Our enemies • Read Matthew 5:38-47
The desperate • Read Matthew 25:31-46

Which of these is an area where you can take immediate steps to help? What will you do?

Two horizontal lines for writing.

Which of these jumps out at you as especially difficult? Why? What will it take for you to move in this area?

Three horizontal lines for writing.

TIME, TALENTS, TREASURE

Read the well-known story of the widow and her coins in Mark 12:41-44. Jesus emphasized the fullness of the widow's monetary gift. What gifts are you being called to give from the storehouses of your time, your talents, and your treasure (finances)? How will these benefit your community in a way that honors God?

Three horizontal lines for writing.

THE IMPACT OF LOVE

We love because God directs us to, but we also see that love has a powerful impact. Read Romans 12:17-21, then Acts 16:22-34. How did the evidence of Paul and Silas' faith win the jailor? What impact might our love have in winning another to faith in Christ?

Two horizontal lines for writing.

LESSON 9

faith in the arenas of life PART OF THE BODY

CONNECTING WITH YOUR CHURCH

Because my white paper was written for potential clients, many of whom have not yet given their lives to Jesus Christ, I did not specifically address the issue of being part of a faith community. As you can imagine, however, this is a matter that means a lot to me. In recent years, I have freshly discovered the many blessings of being involved with other followers of Jesus.

When a church or local fellowship group is healthy, it includes several things: worship, Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and mutual ministry (where we bear one another's burdens). By committing to participate in such a fellowship, we remind ourselves that God's kingdom is not one of independence. Rather, it is a kingdom of dependence on him and interdependence among our brothers and sisters in the faith.

I know, churches have their issues. But that's only because they are comprised of people who have their issues! When these people come together, they are not going to do everything right (even when they're really trying). But God has equipped the members of the body of Christ (aka, the fellowship of believers), and we are supposed to use those gifts to bless each other. We can only do that when we keep the habit of meeting together as his people.

Greg Hurley

LINKS PLAYERS ACTIVELY PLANTS BIBLE STUDIES where people play golf. We want men and women to meet together around the Word of God. But these studies are not really "the church." They do not normally include musical worship; and because they often meet in private clubs, they cannot always throw open the doors so that anyone may attend. This is why we encourage participants to broaden their connection to a "full-service church," where musical worship and cross-generational ministry are in place alongside study and prayer.

With this in mind, let's explore some of Scripture's instruction for church involvement, which in many ways is taken for granted in the New Testament.

THE COMPONENTS OF CONNECTION

In Acts 2:42-47, we find a description of the practice of the followers of Jesus when they first began meeting. List the components of their fellowship.

How do these components line up with the churches you are familiar with?

THE CHURCH GATHERING

When a church conducts its formal gathering, we have said that several practices should be in place. Let's examine the biblical bases for these.

Musical worship • Read Ephesians 5:19-20

In what way does musical worship allow us to settle our spirits in Christ?

Bible teaching • Read Acts 2:42a, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 2:1-3

How does careful Bible teaching train you for life in Christ?

Prayer • Read 1 Thessalonians 4:2-4, James 5:13-16

What makes prayer an avenue for ministry to one another?

Fellowship • Read Proverbs 27:17, John 13:34-35, 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and 5:14-15, Hebrews 10:25

Drawn from these passages, what does healthy fellowship involve?

FINANCES AND MINISTRY

Although many people balk at the church's requests for money, when rightly made these agree with Scripture. Consider the following passages as you review your own faith in God's provision and generosity: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, Hebrews 13:7, 1 Timothy 5:17-18 and 6:17-19. What commitment of generosity do you need to make toward those who have need, including those whose ministry serves and nurtures you?

EXCELLENT GIVING

When it comes to generous giving, four threads run through the Old and New Testaments: faith, thankfulness, care for those who minister, and care for those who have need. Explore these threads in depth in our accompanying article, "Why We Give," available at linksplayers.com (click on Articles).

LESSON 10

faith in the arenas of life

BREATHING WELL

REST AND RELAXATION

For the executive and the entrepreneur, stress is an everyday part of life. And if it's not properly dealt with, stress can lead to sickness, disease, even death. One retired FBI agent we interviewed had witnessed first-hand how stress and a lack of exercise contributed to the early death of a close friend. He told us: "I would give everything I have to be healthy."

Some people keep on living simply because they have good genes. They may make all kinds of mistakes in their health choices and still survive. But here are the operative words: *some people*. We haven't all won the genetic lottery, so to speak, so we need to keep our bodies healthy.

Because physical health may seem like a lesser priority in the midst of a spiritual discussion, you may be surprised to discover that God has made room for his people to stop working and start breathing.

Except when you are ill, if you cannot say that you feel physically energized or that you have a positive outlet through exercise for your stress, it's time for you to take a look at ways to get your health on track. There's a reason President John Kennedy once said, "Physical fitness...is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity"!

Greg Hurley

WHEN YOU ASK PEOPLE IF THEY CAN NAME the pieces of that master list we call the Ten Commandments, most people rattle off a few of them quite easily: don't murder, don't lie, don't steal, don't commit adultery. A few add the restrictions against idols and using the Lord's name flippantly (in vain). But few land here: remember the Sabbath. This fourth commandment hearkens back to the creation account of Scripture when God spent six days laying down the foundations of the world, establishing the plant and animal kingdoms, and breathing life into the first man and woman. After this, we are told, "on the seventh day, God rested from all the work he had done."

Perhaps because you have always seen that account as a quaint story, or perhaps because you've been caught up in the debate over whether or not these were literal days, you've missed the point all along: God rested and God wants us to rest.

THE SABBATH AND YOU

Look at the Sabbath laws as set forth in Exodus 23:10-12. While we can contend from the New Testament that we are free from the rigidity of the law, what do we learn here about God's emphasis on rest, which is also threaded into the New Testament?

What do you recognize as healthy about rest?
What most often keeps you from it?



While your body is only a temporary dwelling, even the Bible encourages you to take good care of your physical self for the sake of the kingdom.

CARDIO/CARE FOR YOUR BODY

JESUS AND THE SABBATH

The religious leaders of the day set themselves at odds with Jesus about the Sabbath, for they had “fenced in” the Sabbath with all kinds of strictures that exceeded the spirit of the law. Let’s review a couple of these encounters and see what we can gain from them.

Read Matthew 12:1-14. What category of work did Jesus allow for on the Sabbath (consider verse 12)? How would you separate out this kind of work from your regular work? How is it something that would bring rest rather than stress?

CARE FOR OUR BODIES

Beyond rest, Scripture also encourages us to take good care of our bodies. While the context of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 flows from a discussion about sexual purity, the language of the passage is also applicable to other physical care. What might this include?

Now read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and 1 Timothy 4:8. What connection do these passages make between physical exercise and spiritual advancement? How might physical exercise distract us from our faith pursuits? How might it aid us?

A BALANCED APPROACH

In Acts 2:46, Philippians 4:12, and 1 Timothy 5:23, we find cases that encouraged a balanced life, not given to asceticism and not driven by bodily urges. How do you need to cultivate balance in your life?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

faith in the arenas of life
SEVEN COMMITMENTS

ONE LINKS PLAYERS BOARD MEMBER has posted his life commitments in his shower, where he is reminded of them each morning. Let's now make personal commitments of our own based on what we have studied. In a sentence, how will you endeavor to apply your faith in Christ in the seven arenas we have examined together? Write your commitments below (and post them where you'll see them!).

CHRIST How will I stand firm in Christ?

CAREER How will I weave Christ into my career pursuits and activities?

COUPLES How will I demonstrate the love of Christ in my marriage?

CHILDREN What will I do to show Jesus to my children?

CARE FOR PARENTS How will I honor my parents in the years ahead?

COMMUNITY How will I engage in my community and church as one who loves Christ?

CARDIO What will I do to give my body the care that it needs so that I may serve Christ well?
