



Links Players

A PURPOSE TO OUR HOLIDAYS 3: A NEW YEAR

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” (John 15:2, NIV)

THE ANSWER WAS EASY FOR ME. As the year came to a close a week ago, I started seeing questions like this one on social media: What are your goals for your golf game in 2018? Simply, I’d love to play more. The last quarter of 2017 kept me away from the course by way of work and weather and whatever else told me, “Sorry, no golf today.”

I’m not sure you can set a goal for more golf without making other changes in your life. I must do less of something else in order to play more golf. Of course, this is true of every reordering of priorities, which is something many of us consider doing at this time of year. To read your Bible more, you will need to watch TV less. To spend more time with family, you will need to spend less time at work. To serve others in the community, you will need to give up some of your personal pursuits. These are the kinds of trade-offs that solidify a commitment to change.

As believers, we do well to tend toward activities and disciplines that reflect the heart of God. And certainly, Scripture reading, family time, and service could be counted among these. But if we take up these endeavors because they would look good on our spiritual résumé, we may be functioning from the flesh rather than by the Spirit.

Don’t miss the importance of this. The greatest of all resets in life comes when we are born again—or more precisely, as Jesus said, “born of water and the Spirit.” Our natural person is put to death and a new life rises up by the Spirit within us.

When this happens, God goes to work in us. We are never born again *again*, but we are renewed all the while through the process of spiritual pruning that Jesus described for his disciples in John 15. He told them that he, Christ, is the vine tended by the Father. And the work of the Father in tending that vine is focused on producing more and more fruit. This is accomplished through the pruning of the branches (us), whereby dead wood is cut away so new blossoming may occur.

The best of all resolutions, whether made at New Year or any other times, is to allow the Father to do his great work in you. This may mean, as we saw earlier, that a lesser thing will need to give way. Are you willing to make this surrender? If so, you open the door for the best changes possible in your life.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/EF9cqPCT3rI>

Opening questions Do you have plans for improving your golf game in 2018? What will it take to make this happen? What might hinder even your best intentions?

READING John 15:1-8; Acts 3:19-20 & 1 John 1:9; Romans 12:1-2

Staying in place for the pruning (John 15)
What does it take to remain in Christ as he urged his disciples to do? Is this a discipline of heart, mind, soul, or strength?

Confession and refreshing (Acts 3 & 1 John 1)
What act is exhorted in these passages? What does God do to renew us when we are willing to humble ourselves in this way? Are you at a place of confession in your life today?

Fresh minds (Romans 12)
When it comes to transformation through a renewed mind, what part of this is our work and what part of it is God’s?
