

LINKS PLAYERS MAG 4: AUSTIN'S GROWTH

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. (1 Peter 1:22, NIV)

AS A HIGH SCHOOL KID, I spent long summer evenings playing golf until the last vestige of light allowed us to see only from here to there. When this year's first LPGA major championship, the ANA Inspiration, snuck in one more playoff hole under hastily ignited floodlights, I enjoyed watching, because I have been where these contestants were—trying to capture just one more hole.

It is in hours like these that we can fall into the wistful plea, “Oh, to be young again.”

There is, perhaps, something to be envied in young, strong men and women, such as we see in the LPGA's Austin Ernst, a tour winner and Solheim Cup standout. Maybe it is what we have lost; maybe it is something we never possessed.

Such meditation, however, tends toward the physical aspects of who we are and what we can accomplish when we are well-framed and fit, when our energy seems to go on and on, and when our dreams pull us along. Yet we are so much more than this. As we progress experientially, we grow in our emotional and relational understandings. More than this, as those who have chosen to follow Jesus, we should be growing in our spiritual character and connections. And when we do, we would not think of going back to our younger days, where we appear so immature now in our own eyes.

Such spiritual growth, as we discussed with Ernst in this year's Links Players magazine, comes in two arenas: personal practice and corporate commitments. We take time on our own to grow in the Lord, spending precious minutes and hours in reading and prayer. Jesus, we know, found renewal in his late nights and early mornings with the Father. We should seek this same time as frequently as possible.

Then we turn outward in fellowship and service. Men and women of God minister to each other when we give away the love we have learned from the Lord himself. The Spirit compels us through the Word and we begin to exercise the one anothers: be patient with one another, forgive one another, seek one another's good, bear one another's burdens, speak truth to one another—here are only a few of more than 40 such exhortations. As we grow, we get with it, serving the Lord by fellowshiping with others and ministering in his name. The love in us becomes love reaching out.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study can be found at https://youtu.be/ZktNj_JknAU. The Links Players magazine article with Austin Ernst is available here: <http://www.linksplayers.com/articles/austin-ernst>.

Opening questions Did you grow up around the game? What are some special memories you have from those early days? • What is one place you recognize maturity in yourself that was not there even 10 years ago?

READING Psalm 119:33-37; Ephesians 5:19; Acts 2:42-44

Getting personal with God (Psalm 119)
 What lines in this passage stand out as expressions of personal connection to God and a quest for growth in relationship with him?

Music in the heart (Ephesians 5)
 How does this little verse show us both the personal and corporate aspects of our faith? Does it inspire you to add a new dimension to your fellowship with others?

All together now (Acts 2)
 What specific corporate practices do we see among the first believers? Do you see these in your fellowship or church today? How do these things support your own growth in the faith? Where might you grow in helping others along?
