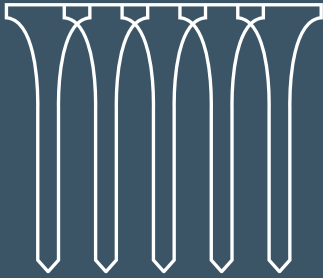



**THE PLAYER'S  
HANDBOOK**

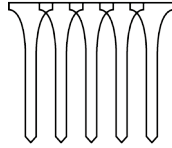


# Links Players



**Five lessons  
to orient you  
in the  
game of life**





# **Links Players Handbook**

Originally authored by Jim Sheard & Steve Arnold

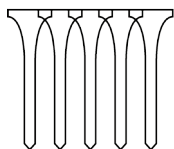
Revisions by Jeff Hopper

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**Links Players** exists to help golfers change the conversation at their clubs.  
The core of our ministry is local Links Fellowships, which we equip through  
printed and video resources, including the Links Daily Devotional and Links  
Players Magazine.

Find out more about Links Players at [linksplayers.com](http://linksplayers.com).



## THE FIVE LESSONS OF LINKS PLAYERS

The Links Players Handbook follows the five foundational ideas established by one of founders, Jim Hiskey, nearly 40 years ago. From time to time, we have considered other ways of communicating what is most important in life. We've never been able to improve on these five. They convey the very life Jesus would have us live in representing him as those who have received his salvation and anticipate eternal life with him.

Each of the studies in this handbook reviews one of the foundational ideas. A typical group might spend one session on each study. For Links Fellowships, we consider this an excellent way to get your Fellowship started. Also, as future participants check in with the Fellowship, a designated individual might meet with the new participant individually to walk them through the lessons.

Here are the five foundational ideas:

**L** Love God and others (the Great Commandment)

Matthew 22:37-39

**I** Integrate Christ's reign and integrity into all of life

Matthew 6:33

**N** Network friends together in Christ

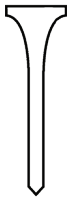
Acts 2:42

**K** Kindle compassion for the poor and needy

Matthew 25:40

**S** Share Christ through the great game of golf

2 Corinthians 5:20



## LESSON 1

### LOVE GOD AND OTHERS

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on the greatest commandment in Scripture. In Matthew 22:36 Jesus was asked to state the most important commandment. He quoted from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Secondly, we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Jesus called these the foremost commandments—the commandments on which all others “hang.”

The passage reveals the importance of:

- Loving God completely
- Loving our neighbor compassionately
- Loving ourselves correctly

We want to explore what it means to love God, especially with all our heart, soul and mind. We will see that God has initiated this love by first loving us. “He gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16), who would die to provide a sacrificial covering for our sins. Without a recognition of this great love, all the good we do is only moral effort or religious activity. But when we accept that salvation, loving God because he first loved us occupies the center of our faith as we act it out.

If we love God through his Son Jesus, we will also love our “neighbors.” These are the people near to us, including those we live with and near, those we work with, and those with whom we share recreation, like golf.

#### STUDY AND DISCUSSION

*Read Matthew 22:34-40 and Deuteronomy 6:4-5.*

1. What key thought from Matthew 22:34-40 stands out for you?

2. What do these phrases mean to you?

- “All your heart”

- “All your soul”

- “All your mind”

3. *Read Acts 2:36-41*. What are the initial steps in responding to God, which is how we demonstrate our love for him?

4. *Read Colossians 3:1-10*. What other patterns for loving God do you see here?

5. What is the second key commandment? Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to show how we are called to love our neighbors. To what measure do you anticipate making adjustments to your own priorities as the Samaritan did in order to love others?

6. *Read Colossians 3:12-17*. What practices for loving others do you find here?

7. What types of evidence show that a person is fulfilling . . .

(a) the first commandment?

(b) the second commandment?

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How do you know God has shown his love for you?

2. One thing you can do today...

to recognize God's love for you is:

to love God more completely is:

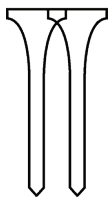
to love others more compassionately is:

3. List some of your neighbors (near ones) to whom God wants you to show love.  
Are some of the neighbors your friends or acquaintances through golf?

4. Prayer (talking to God and listening to him) is one way of showing love to God.  
What areas did this study identify that you want to pray about over the next few days? If possible, take some time to start praying about these things now.

5. I would like my partners in faith to pray for me this week and hold me accountable for:





## LESSON 2

### INTEGRATE CHRIST'S REIGN AND AUTHORITY INTO ALL OF LIFE

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson is designed to help you gain a deeper level of commitment to Christ and a greater desire to integrate the reign of Christ over all aspects of your life, including your home and your work.

We must always remember, though, that Jesus' primary motive was not to teach people how to be religious but how to have a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe. One of the most staggering facts of the good news of Jesus is the promise that he offers to enter the heart of the person who puts his trust in him. This means that we aren't simply *motivated* to follow him, but we are *empowered* to follow him by his presence in us. From there, we move into practices and attitudes in our daily activities that reveal his presence in us. For many people, this results in significant life changes, because with Jesus first our priorities change entirely.

God sent Jesus into the world, not only as Savior, but as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16). Paul explained: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

We are to allow Christ to reign in our lives. As we learn and grow in our relationship with him, he will show us how to give him control—that is, how to integrate Christ in all areas of our life. Two key areas of our life are family and vocation. God created the family and wants to guide us in making it a safe, nurturing place where we give and receive love. It is the place of our most intimate and important relationships. Our vocation (our work and how we utilize our talents) is also important to God. He has created each of us with unique talents, and wants both our vocation and avocations to be fulfilling.

#### STUDY AND DISCUSSION

*Read Matthew 6:33 and John 15:1-8.*

1. According to these passages, what place should Christ have in our life?
  
2. Jesus said, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (John 15:4). How active a task is this remaining? What do you think it will accomplish?
  
3. Jesus added, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). While this may not be a literal “nothing,” what do you think we are incapable of without Christ?
  
4. Like a branch separated from the trunk, the believer who does not abide in Christ “withers” (John 15:6). What does that mean? If you have experienced it, what is it like?
  
5. Consider the kingdom of God. Who is the ruler of this kingdom? What is he trying to do in his kingdom? How should we respond to such a king?
  
6. What does it look like to “integrate Christ’s reign” into...
  - ... your family life?
  
  - ... your work life?
  
  - ... your recreational life?

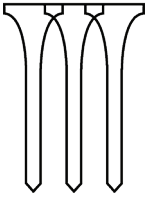
7. What are some common reasons people do not make Christ the Lord of their lives? Why does this happen?

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Being honest with yourself, where in your life would you say you have not yet given Christ full reign?
  
2. What practices or habits need to be changed for you to better integrate Christ's reign in your family? in your work? in your recreation?
  
3. What other emphases cause your life to fall out of balance, leaving you chasing things that lack eternal significance?
  
4. If asked how you might integrate Christ into your life, how would you answer?
  - \_\_\_ Receive Jesus Christ into my heart.
  - \_\_\_ Affirm Christ lives in my heart and life.
  - \_\_\_ Get started with the habit of practicing God's presence throughout the day.
  - \_\_\_ Ask the Lord in prayer to help me maintain balance according to his desires for my life.
  - \_\_\_ Call someone in our fellowship to ask for their prayer and support when I am prone to temptation.
  - \_\_\_ Spend 20 minutes reading Scripture four to six times a week.

What is the first practical step you need to take in this pursuit?

5. I would like my partners in faith to pray for me this week and hold me accountable for:



## LESSON 3

### NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

The purpose of this lesson is to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christ-centered fellowship. When people are networked together, especially when that network is built on spiritual connections, we say these people are in fellowship with one another.

When Jesus began his ministry, he invited 12 weak and fallen followers into his closest group of relationships. At Pentecost, he gave 11 of those 12—and many other devout men and women from every nation—his Holy Spirit. As we look back 2,000 years, we see how this tiny fellowship reproduced themselves over and over. Today there are more than two billion people in this great network. All true followers of Christ are linked together in a great family, called in Scripture “the body of Christ.”

While faith in Christ is an individual matter, we are not to live in relationship with him only as individuals. Our connection with our Savior is an ongoing activity where we are in communion with other believers as well as with Jesus. These other believers encourage, exhort, care for, and serve us, just as we are to do for them. In fact, believers are given the Holy Spirit to equip us for this very purpose.

Links Fellowships, like other small groups, can be a vital supporting community as you walk with Jesus. Though corporate worship and faithful teaching are essential to our growth as believers, you may get lost in the crowd at a large local church. Smaller groups of believers learning and praying together give an additional boost to our faith. For this reason, it is important that we learn how to support and encourage each other in mutual ministry as members of the same fellowship.

#### STUDY AND DISCUSSION

*Read Acts 2:42, 1 John 3:11-18, and Colossians 3:12-17.*

1. Webster's dictionary defines “fellowship” as follows:
  - a. Companionship, company

- b. Community of interest, activity
- c. Company of equals or friends—an association
- d. A quality or state of being comradely

Circle the parts of the definition above that describe the word *fellowship* as it is used in the passages you've read.

What other aspects of fellowship do you find in these scriptures?

2. When you think of networking for God's purposes, does this change the motivation behind your friendships, as opposed to the way you might network for business? How so?

3. From our passages, what activities are believers supposed to engage in together? Do you currently have a faith community that shares these things?

4. From 1 John 3 and Colossians 3, what is the most important trait we should demonstrate to others? What are some of the practical expressions of this as described in these passages?

5. What is special or unique about having a friend who shares...

... your enjoyment of golf?

... your commitment to Christ?

... both?

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. We've been invited into a fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3). Jesus calls his disciples "friends." He wants his friends to love one another, keep his Father's commands as he has, experience his joy, and bear lasting fruit (see John 15:8-16).

How well you are doing at each of these?

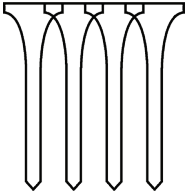
2. Being honest with yourself, how would you describe your friendship/fellowship with others? Does it have a spiritual component, where you encourage and are encouraged in your faith?

3. What one or two steps can you take today to build closer fellowship with others and with Jesus?

4. Networking is giving and receiving from others so that both parties are benefited by the exchange. What plans will you make so you can give and receive from other friends in Christ?

5. Are you interested in inviting others to share your community of faith? How would a healthy community practicing love and care for one another be attractive to others?

6. I would like my partners in faith to pray for me this week and hold me accountable for:



## LESSON 4

### KINDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY

“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.’” (Matthew 25:40)

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

Compassion for the less fortunate is kindled by the Holy Spirit as we receive God’s love. To have compassion for others, we must slow down, be aware of those in need, and take time to respond. This goes beyond networking with familiar friends; it is reaching out to those in need.

You must be ready to recognize those who need your compassion. The poor and needy may be within your own family, a neighbor, a fellow church member, or someone at work. They may even be someone you play golf with regularly or a member of the staff at your club. You will also come across “strangers” (people you do not yet know) to whom you need to offer compassion through your time and resources. They may be physically needy, emotionally needy, relationally needy, or spiritually needy.

Many people desperately need a word of encouragement or someone to listen. At other times they may need a helping hand or some other material resource you can offer. One thing’s for sure: everyone needs the truth of the gospel message—that Jesus loves us so much he came to die to erase the consequences of our sin. When we serve and speak to others with this message in mind, we reflect the heart of our Savior.

Even more, when we serve others, we serve Jesus. As you reflect upon our passage in Matthew 25, you will see Jesus teaching that he is represented by those in need. When we serve him, we both demonstrate the love God has shown to us and avoid the judgment of God for failure to reach out with compassion.

#### STUDY AND DISCUSSION

*Read Matthew 25:31-46 and James 1:22-27 & 2:14-17.*

1. List the six kinds of people in Matthew 25 for whom we are to show concern.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

- d.
- e.
- f.

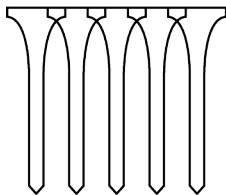
How frequently do you come into contact with such people? How do you respond when you do?

2. Do you find an extra motivation to coming alongside the needy when you realize that this is how we serve Christ himself? What changes is this causing you to consider even now?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What lines catch your particular attention in James 1 and 2? Do you find yourself practicing or neglecting “pure religion” (verse 27) in the way you express your faith?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. From these passages, would you define compassion more as a feeling or an action? What actions does living compassion include?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Golfers are often perceived to be among the most fortunate of people. To what extent is this true? What do you think it means in terms of “kingdom currency” when fortunate people take the lead in reaching out to the neediest people?



## PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. After reading these passages, would you say you are a compassionate person? If your compassion is limited, what is holding you back?
2. Who are those around you needing compassionate care? Who are the poor and needy (“the least of these”) in your life? What kinds of needs do they have? In what ways can you help them that you are not helping now?
3. Are there situations where Christ would have acted differently toward a “stranger” than you did? Watch for future opportunities in your life to act, or react, as Jesus would if he were there.
4. How can you demonstrate compassion that prepares you for the day you stand before Jesus the King while you are at your golf club? Is this harder or easier to do than in other settings?
5. Ask God to show you one or more people for whom you should demonstrate compassionate concern during this coming week. Then ask your partners in faith to pray for you and hold you accountable to serving these people soon.



## LESSON 5

### SHARE CHRIST THROUGH THE GREAT GAME OF GOLF

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.  
(2 Corinthians 5:20a)

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

The final lesson, like the one before it, pushes our focus outward. In compassion, we help meet others where they feel a need. With evangelism, we try to reach them at their heart of hearts.

To evangelize, or share Christ, means to explain to others (1) who Jesus is and (2) what he has done. It also includes an invitation to respond in faith. The goal is that our hearers would believe Jesus, confess their need for him, forsake their sinful life (repent), and pray for salvation in Christ (Acts 2:38).

The best tool for evangelism is God's Word itself, the Bible. You can share the heart of the salvation message knowing as little as one verse. Here's an example: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). But the more we know of Scripture, the more equipped we will be to answer people's questions in God's own words.

The Bible teaches that every believer is "an ambassador for Christ" and "entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Further, we have been "entrusted with the Gospel" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). So we do well when we learn to share Christ. This is not about sharing our church's good qualities or our favorite Christian teacher or band. We share Jesus himself, for he alone has the power to change lives. We want to be ready to do this whenever we can.

The purpose of this lesson is to examine how to fulfill our responsibilities as an ambassador for Christ. The game of golf provides a common bond between people, creating the opportunity to share the truth of Christ's claims to those who have never heard, or not yet responded to, this message.

#### STUDY AND DISCUSSION

*Read 2 Corinthians 5:20a, Matthew 28:19, and 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.*

1. After reading 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, fill in the following:

Christ \_\_\_\_\_ in accordance with the \_\_\_\_\_ (see verse 3). He was

\_\_\_\_\_, and he was \_\_\_\_\_ in accordance with the scripture (see verse 4).

2. The essence of the Gospel, which literally means “good news,” is that Christ died for our sins according to the prophecy of scripture, he was buried and he rose again. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, was determined to know only \_\_\_\_\_ and him \_\_\_\_\_.
3. *Read Philippians 3:8.* How does knowing Christ like this precede making him known? Right now, are you more about knowing Christ or making him known?
4. *Read John 4:7-24.* Consider how Jesus spoke to this woman. What was his tone? How did he use the context of the scene in communicating with the woman? What was her response?
5. Now consider the language and metaphors of golf. Can you think of a golf example that would allow you to share the message of Jesus effectively with your golf friends? How do you think they might respond?
6. *Review John 3:16-17, Acts 2:38-39, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, and 1 John 1:9.* How would knowing passages like these equip you to speak about Jesus and the forgiveness and salvation he worked on the cross? Which are you eager to memorize soon?

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Before you can give away the message of salvation in Jesus, you need to possess it yourself. Are you saved? How do you know this to be true? What biblical passages secure this truth for you?
2. Think of the traits of a governmental ambassador. In what ways do you currently see yourself as an ambassador of Christ among your friends, including those who play golf? How can you improve in this area?
3. List several friends you have who need the salvation Jesus provides. Take time to pray for their salvation even now. Also, ask the Lord to give you opportunity to speak to them about what he has done for you.
4. As you look back over the five lessons of a Links Player, which one holds the most meaning for you? Why do you think this is so? Do you see now how these lessons are meant to be a response to what Christ has done for us and in us, rather than religious efforts done in our own strength?
5. What do you think the next steps in your walk with Christ need to be? How can the members of your group pray for you and hold you accountable to taking these steps?

## BEYOND THE FIVE LESSONS INCREASING YOUR DISCIPLESHIP EVERY DAY

A study like the one you have just completed is never the end. We could spend a lifetime putting its principles into practice.

Golf provides an excellent metaphor for us here, because we must keep learning new situations and shots if we are going to improve. Even if we stick with the game for a lifetime, as our bodies change, we will need to learn to approach the game in a new way. But it always the same game with the same objective. We swing our clubs and stroke our putts toward the goal of achieving the lowest score possible.

The walk with Jesus is not a scorekeeping endeavor, of course, but here too we want to keep growing and learning. Contexts change, new opportunities arise, we meet new friends (and challengers!), and our experiences teach and train us. But Jesus provides us with the same objective in all of these circumstances and seasons of life. We should never stop wanting to deepen our relationship with him, loving him with firmer obedience and loving others with deepening grace.

This long, steady process of following Jesus has been called the same thing since he gathered men and women around him to teach them his ways: discipleship. When we read his words—whether the precepts, the parables, or the prophecies—we latch on to yet more of his wisdom. And when we go to him in prayer, asking him to help us live out what he taught, we can be assured that these are prayers he will answer. Of course he wants his people to be like him!

**Links Player, we encourage you to never stop playing.** You don't want your faith to become a passive thing. Maybe that's why it's called a walk with Jesus. We can't stand still and walk at the same time. When we walk, we can't grow stagnant or staid.

Take up the habits of prayer and Scripture reading and mutual ministry among your fellow Links Players, your brothers and sisters in Christ. Encourage one another with the words of God right from the pages of your Bible. This is the Holy-Spirit breathed voice of God. Listen to him and live!

Finally, don't keep any of this to yourself. "Make the most of every opportunity" (Colossians 4:5) to show the love of Christ and share the message of Christ. Reach out as one who knows Jesus so that others may know him, too.

## **EXTRA HELP**

### **ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE READINGS**

#### LOVE GOD AND OTHERS

Matthew 20:25-28; John 15:9-14; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 1 John 4:7-21

#### INTEGRATE CHRIST'S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE

Daniel 1:1-20; Matthew 19:16-30; Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:23-24

#### NETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST

1 Samuel 20:42; Proverbs 17:17, 18:24; Romans 14:1-15:3; Ephesians 4:1-7;  
1 Corinthians 12:12-27

#### KINDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY

Leviticus 19:9-10; Isaiah 58:5-9; Acts 4:32-35; 1 Timothy 6:17-19;  
Hebrews 13:1-3

#### SHARE CHRIST THROUGH THE GREAT GAME OF GOLF

Matthew 5:14-16; Mark 13:11; Acts 17:1-34; 1 John 1:1-3

## **AVAILABLE RESOURCES**

In addition to this quick overview study of the five lessons of a Links Player, we offer in-depth Bible studies on each of the five lessons. You can find these at [linksplayers.com](http://linksplayers.com). Look for our Bible studies, which you may download and print from PDF files at no charge.

If you are not currently reading the Links Daily Devotional, it is a great way to stay connected to the Word of God by way of your email inbox each day. Each Friday's devotion also includes a quick-to-print Bible study for learning and discussion. Many of these include introductory videos. Read and subscribe at [linksplayers.com/devotional](http://linksplayers.com/devotional).



## Every golfer can be a Links Player.

Links Players are not defined by the distance their tee shots fly, the style of their clothing, the brand of their equipment, the players in their foursome, or even the score they post at the end of the round. For golfers, all those things might matter, but not one is of ultimate importance.

For the Links Player, the objective of the game reaches beyond all these things into the hearts of the men and women who play it. Who guides their perspective? What are their priorities? Who joins them in their efforts? Who are they reaching out to help and influence? When these questions are answered with the direction of the Scriptures, foundations are established for living in the strength and spirit of Jesus Christ.

**The Links Players Handbook** provides help in establishing these foundations through the framework of the five tenets of Links Players. An excellent study for individuals or groups, it is especially designed to help the participants of local Links Fellowships to start with a common understanding of what is important to God. The handbook can then be used to introduce new participants to the Fellowship's key emphases as well.



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Publishing**