



1 2 3 PRAYERS FOR YOUR CLUB

Some years ago when Andy Martinez was caddying for Tom Lehman, Martinez was asked what he appreciated about Lehman. His response was simple: “He plays well, he pays well, and he prays well.”

We probably can’t describe Links Fellowships with a triplet that easy to remember, but we do say that they are gatherings of golfers in a club where the participants play together, study together, and pray together. If you land upon the perfect P for that middle verb, feel emboldened to let us know!

ARTICLE BY JEFF HOPPER

Prayer comes in many forms. Some have become famous among those who pray often, including the ACTS acronym of Adoration-Confession-Thanksgiving-Supplication. A Links Fellowship has a more specific position and purpose, however, and we would tell leaders that their participants in their Fellowships should be praying for each other and praying for their club.

That first arena—praying for each other—is fairly self-explanatory, because this is something a lot of believers are used to doing. The exchange prayer requests for personal needs, as well as for the needs of friends and family, and they then pray for those stated needs. In the richest fellowships (wherever they are), those prayers dig into the spiritual along with the physical and circumstantial. So we pray not only for each other’s ailments or business decisions, say, but we pray also for one’s struggles with a particular sin or for development of a much needed character trait that reflects Christ more closely.

It’s the second prayer, the one where you pray for your club, that may leave you with some uncertainty. We don’t want to fall prey to the Christian meme of “God bless everyone” wherein our prayers become so generalized they have little point—even though we would certainly say theologically speaking that God can bless everyone! Let’s talk, then, about three meaningful prayers your Fellowship can pray on behalf of your club.

RECEPTIVITY

You can begin by praying that the men and women in your club will become increasingly receptive to the message and work of Christ among them. Paul offered this mentor's advice to Timothy: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

The First Century disciples certainly understood opposition and persecution; they encountered it frequently and, in places, quite harshly. Your club is likely not this way, but the hearts of people have not changed. Some will be outspoken against the gospel, some will tolerate it in the open but fight it behind closed doors (as in a board meeting), some will nod kindly and walk on—you'll see any and all of this if you're making any impact at all.

Paul's words to Timothy are informative, because they take a general idea and apply it specifically. He told his protégé that prayer should be made for "all people." But then he addressed the fact that those in leadership can use their position to lay out a red carpet or throw up a hostile roadblock. Pray to be welcomed, Paul was saying.

Never take the receptivity you have from the governors at your club for granted. It does not have to be this way. Pray together in your Fellowship for an ongoing openness to what you are doing and the influence you have among the members and staff at your club.

Under this same heading, pray for an open reception from individuals in your club. You may find two reminders from Jesus' teaching helpful here. First, he said more than once after completing a story, "Let him who has ears hear." He was allowing for the fact that not everyone listened to him with intent to actually hear what he had to say. Second, one of the stories, the Parable of

the Sower, recognized that the seed of the gospel did not always land on fertile soil.

No matter how accomplished we might be in relationship-building or conversational interaction or biblical knowledge or apologetics, we cannot rightly expect most people (or even many people) to perk up when we tell them what we believe and say at first hearing, "I can't believe you're telling me this right now. It's what I've been wondering all week!" (Although, this does happen, for there are always those whose ears are open and

whose heart soil is rich and ready for planting.) So pray together in your Fellowship for a willingness among those with whom you speak both to hear and receive the gospel. You may even keep an active list of specific men and women, praying regularly for them by name.

SALVATION

The willingness of a person to hear what you have to say is never the end goal. In terms of one's eternal position before God, an open ear is not enough. But some of the people you talk with in your club will

take a pride in receiving your message openly—to them it is a sign of tolerance or even real kindness. There's no denying this may be truly what they are showing you, but it does not mean they are interested in the change that salvation brings.

Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus foresaw a horrifying scenario at the end of days when we come before the judgment seat of God. It is there that our hearts will be evaluated by the Maker of the universe. Nothing we have encountered in this life approaches the sobriety of that day! But what is so difficult to swallow is that Jesus said there would be those who come and make their case with God on the basis of the things they had done in his name. "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" they will ask. Jesus will then reply, "Then I will tell them

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plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Do you see what will happen here? Those who thought they were close to God—because they were a nice to Christians or were religiously active or “loved all people the same”—will find that what they were lacking was a proper relationship with Jesus Christ. They have not repented and been saved from their sin, nor will they be saved eternally to live with Jesus. (Please do not make this mistake yourself. Consider for a moment if you have ever urgently asked, as the first believers did of Peter when they became aware of their sin and the salvation offered only in Jesus, “What shall I do?” He told them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of your sins.” See Acts 2:22-39.)

It is imperative, if we truly believe the vital nature of the gospel message we carry, to pray for the salvation of others. This is something your Fellowship can do together. It is the natural follow-up to praying for the receptive ears of specific members and staff. Ask that the Lord will first give them ears to hear, then a heart to receive what he promises when they come in faith to him: the forgiveness of sins, new and abundant life, and an eternal place with him when all things are restored by his hand.

REVIVAL

When we think of revival, we typically do so with an eye to the old-fashioned ways of the church, when preachers traveled from place to place and proclaimed the gospel at the front of a sawdust trail under a canvas tent. Or, if you have a knowledge of church history, you may be aware of some of the great movements of God where whole cities or nations responded with receptivity and repentance to the words of a prophet or preacher. This is what happened when Jonah preached in Nineveh and

Peter in Jerusalem at Pentecost, but it is also what happened in Wales through Evan Roberts and in Los Angeles through William Seymour, both in the early 1900s. These men were only instruments of God’s reviving work, but this is how God functions on earth: through his divinely-placed people.

Which brings us to a powerful question: *Why exactly is your Fellowship in place at your club right now?* Obviously, it serves a role in the lives of the individual men or women who choose to attend each week, no matter where they are in their walk with Christ at this time. For these people, your Fellowship is a safe place to investigate the claims of Jesus in the Scriptures and to ask important questions about how to work out one’s faith with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). But what if your Fellowship is positioned for something much bigger than this in terms of numbers? What if it is positioned to lead a revival?

The word *revival* has at its root the Latin *vivere*, which means to live. And the prefix *re-* means back to or again. Most literally, then, *revival* means to live again. Spiritually, this does not make sense when applied to a person first coming to faith after a lifetime of being “dead in their sins” (Ephesians 2:1). That person is brought to life for the very first time.

But when we consider the lives of men and women today in so many Western countries, but certainly in North America, we recognize that the culture around them has been spiritually dead for some time now—at least several decades. Whereas most Europeans were churchgoers into the early part of the 20th Century, almost none attend services today. This shift took longer in the United States, but churchgoing has been replaced by other family activities, including sports and recreation where God is never referenced or considered. Entertainment like concerts and movies and TV binging

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fills weekend nights, leaving people too tired and disinterested to make a habit of church.

This is not to say that churchgoing by itself is an indication of one's relationship with Jesus, but it does give us a look into the tide of influence in the lives of regular citizens. They look around and don't see many people going to church. They don't see examples of biblical morality or Christian underpinnings in the media they watch. And as families in one generation have separated themselves from the relevance of faith, the next generation receives no compelling sense that this is something even to consider, let alone something that begs for serious consideration.

So your club needs revival. And your community needs revival in your club. How are these two connected? The average golf club in the average town is comprised of "kings." In ancient times, kings and queens led city-states and even empires. They were people of broad influence—and they were noted for their benevolence or their despotism. (We can go so far as to say that the ideal political structure, biblically speaking, is indeed a benevolent dictatorship, for we know that our sovereign Lord will rule in the fullness of his love at the end of the age.) Today's kings and queens, however, are more commonly corporate leaders, whose position over the lives of the people in their company, whether 20 or 20,000 in number, is far-reaching. In addition to controlling work conditions and salaries, which are major quality of life

matters, these kings can encourage their people toward prioritizing family time, community service, and even personal generosity.

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Now consider what happens to a community where the leaders come to life in Christ and the culture is revived through their changed hearts. It is truly a powerful vision to hold before your

eyes! But don't stop there. Have your Fellowship pray together for revival in your club—that is, for a wide outbreak of true salvation in the hearts of many men and women there. Deeply changed by Christ, their influence will spread far beyond the walls of your club. Men, women, and children in your community may be brought to Christ as these spiritually born leaders lead with the gospel in their hearts, in their priorities, and in their actions.

Maybe there is no bad way to pray for your club. God can interpret our imperfect words and work the purposes that he knows stream from our hearts. But when we approach him with intentionality and specific requests, we show him that we have taken the time to look around at the place he has given us to minister and that we desire him to do great things in and through that place. We show him we are earnest. And this is something he will honor, especially when we are praying together as people loving him, loving each other, and loving those who still need him. ■■■

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