



Links Players

PRAYING FOR BETTER 4: BEARING FRUIT

We pray this is in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work... (Colossians 1:10, NIV)

WE ALL KNOW THE ADAGE, “Practice makes perfect.” We also all know the upgraded version, “Perfect practice makes perfect.” What we’re impatient to know is this: When will all our practice pay off?

Many critics of modern professional sports, and golf in particular, can’t imagine how four days of work merits a player a million dollars—or even the \$225,000 earned by an LPGA Tour winner in a typical tournament. What these critics do not see are the hours and hours of unpaid practice each player has invested just for the opportunity to get the big win. They forget the weeks when a player’s opportunity results in a missed cut and no prize at all for the travel, lodging, meals, and work. Even the caddie gets paid when a player misses the cut!

What we’re saying is that there are many weeks when a player’s preparation doesn’t pay off at all. Their practice bears no fruit.

This may help us understand one of the reasons why Paul prayed that his Colossian readers would bear fruit in every good work. Fruitless labor is discouraging. Paul didn’t want his friends—whom he saw as partners in spreading the gospel—to burn out from their efforts. It was with similar sentiment that he wrote to the Galatians, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” When we have to wait to see the payoff, we may be tempted to give up. Paul prayed this would not happen to his Colossian friends.

Surely there was a greater reason than this for Paul’s prayer. He didn’t want any seed to fall on hard ground, or to be snatched away by enemies of the gospel, or to wither under cultural influences. He wanted the work of the people and the words of God to take root and flourish. In this way, the expanding kingdom that Jesus spoke of would come to life before their eyes, and that would bring rejoicing!

Finally, Paul always had in mind the glory of God. When God’s people do God’s work and the result is positive, ultimately it is God whom people see. Jesus had taught his disciples to let their light shine so others might witness their good deeds and *praise their Father in heaven* (Matthew 5:16). This same goal should keep us committed to the disciplines of growth in Christ, for the pleasure of God is far greater than even a million-dollar check.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this Bible study is available here: https://youtu.be/sIbDv6_Fwx0.

Opening questions How much do you practice at golf? What’s the hardest part about the practice you do? How have you seen your practice pay off? • Where else in your life have you noticed discipline making a long-term difference?

READING Galatians 6:9-10; Matthew 13:18-23; John 15:1-4

Encouraged to stay with it (Galatians 6)

When do you know you’re at risk of burning out, even though the work is important and good? What kinds of encouragement help you keep going?

Lessons from a parable (Matthew 13)

What threats arise against the gospel taking root in people’s hearts? Do you notice any of these threats taking aim at your own faith? How can we help one another grow in fruitfulness?

Jesus and fruitfulness (John 15)

What condition did Jesus name for bearing fruit? Are you aware of a time in your life when you were “pruned” for the sake of greater fruitfulness? How does this experience help you maintain a long-term view?
