



# Links Players

## RESCUED FROM DEATH 3: TIME TO GROW

*Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1, NIV)*

I'VE BEEN WORKING ON MY GOLF GAME FOR MOST OF 40 YEARS NOW. I picked up a sawed-off club before I ever went to school, but like many of you, I worked my way through soccer and baseball and cross country and a little bit of basketball first. Only when it became quite evident that my best chance at making the team was to play an individual sport did I turn fully to golf.

My development was rapid enough at first. Enough kids ran around the club where my father belonged that the professional staff created a great junior program, teaching us the several skills we would need to be complete players. We drilled and competed and found our way to various levels of success. Several of us played in college and one soared above the rest, going as far as the US Women's Amateur final and the Curtis Cup team.

Soon adult life kicked in. I married somewhat early, started a family in my mid-20s, and had a career that boxed in my hours. Same for my wife. There wasn't much time to work on golf. Since then, I have tried to maintain my youthful level of play, vacillating between thinking, *I should be better with all the new equipment* and *I'm sure thankful this new equipment helps me still enjoy the game.*

How about you? Is "growing your game" a futile effort, an extreme challenge, a catch-as-catch-can program, or a diligent routine?

Understanding the way we grow in any aspect of life is important to growing at all. This is no less true with regard to our spiritual life. When we realize that growth is what God has in mind for us, through the process theologians call sanctification, we begin to recognize that so much of what happens to us is meant for our growth. Life is lived on a spectrum extending from triumph to tragedy, and we find learning and growth at every point in between.

For the apostle Paul, sanctification was the process of being made holy—that is, becoming different in a way that reflects Christ. This process is worked in us by the Holy Spirit but that work, as our central verse today suggests, is met by our response: an effort to purify ourselves. Just as when we love golf, we work at it, when we love the Lord, we submit to the process and practice of growth.

**Opening questions** Through the years, what have you found to be the hardest part of your game to develop? • In the same way, what has been a particular challenge in your spiritual growth?

**READING** Romans 8:28-30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, 5:23

### For good (Romans 8)

How is God working behind the scenes in our lives? If justification happens at the time of our salvation and glorification will come when we join Christ in heaven, what does the in-between look like? How is God developing us now?

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### Holy living (1 Thessalonians 4)

How are sanctification and holiness connected? What aspects of holy living are outlined here? As believers, what claim does God have on our lives?

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### Behind our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 5)

Who is ultimately behind our sanctification? Are you comfortable with the balance between God's work in your life and your commitment to holiness (see also 2 Corinthians 7:1)?

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