

TREATING NEWBIES WONDERFULLY

DON'T GET IT'



When did you learn what a bogey is? How about an albatross? And what, again, is the MOI for your driver?

In nearly every new endeavor in life, we will be faced with a similar challenge: learning new terms. Some of these come with a recreational hobby like golf. Here our motivation may be high, because we are enjoying the game and we don't want to look like an outsider any longer than we have to. And the last thing we're about to do is say to a friend, "Hey, would you please dumb this down for me? I'm having a hard time understanding."

But when the stakes are higher—as when a specialist is walking you through the particulars of a new medical diagnosis and the care plan she has for you—you want to make sure you understand each new word. This comes with a greater degree of difficulty, because the context isn't enjoyable and the words are awkward on your tongue. But if you don't get this right, the consequences can be severe. So the doctor and the nurse and the pharmacist get your attention.

Now where does learning the Bible and the doctrinal language that surrounds it fit on this spectrum? This is an important question for those who lead inviting small groups like Links Fellowships. We don't want to make guests and newbies feel like we're dumbing things down, but we also don't want to lose them with our jargon. So what are some good ideas for helping someone who is thinking or saying, "I don't get it"?

1

First, assume your newbie's intelligence. Everyone is smart about something. Their learning may not have come the same way yours did, but they've gathered expertise in one way or another; and the arena in which they're smart carries with it a glossary of its own. You may be able to quickly define and explain an IRA or an IPO, but how about an MCL—either the one referenced by a surgeon or by a plumber? **What this means for a Fellowship leader:** Honor everyone who comes in the room and welcome them to contribute to the conversation, just as a PGA professional

would welcome anyone who wants to try the game to pick up a club.

2

Second, assume your newbie's ignorance. No one knows everything. Even the smartest people rarely know all there is to know, including in their fields of expertise. Knowledge is ever-expanding, with some estimates suggesting that the catalog of available knowledge is doubling daily. Most people recognize their limitations and some express their eagerness to be taught, but we also want to be careful about making others feel deficient. **What this means for a Fellowship leader:** Be careful about using terms that only those who've been around for a while would understand. This doesn't mean you have to avoid such words—just be sure to define them as you go, even for the hundredth time.

3

Third, assume your newbie's interest. This isn't like school. No one is being forced to take those dreaded general ed classes. Your guests almost always show up to your Fellowship at the invitation of a friend or because they've sought out a group like yours. They want to like it. Will you help them? One way to do this in Links Fellowships is to make connections between the lessons and golf, but it can also be done by applying the Scriptures to everyday life, just as Jesus did. Think *powerful principles practically presented*. **What this means for a Fellowship leader:** When you prepare for a lesson, perhaps using one of the many Bible study series available through Links Players, think about ways to connect what is being studied to how life is being lived. You may give personal examples and invite others to do the same.

4

Fourth, assume your newbie's desire for interaction. When your young son or daughter wants to learn to play golf, they are willing to go to the group lessons and junior golf camps you enroll them in. But they really want to play with you, too. The same is true for adults. In addition to the bigger gatherings (and maybe because of them!), they want to sit down with one or two others and talk about the things they are

learning. They'll have questions: "Is this really true? How can I know? What will it mean if I choose to believe? What kind of Bible should I buy? Do I need to go to church? How do I tell my spouse about all this?"

What this means for a Fellowship leader: You'll want to build time for newbies to meet with others outside the scheduled Fellowship meeting. And you may want to provide avenues for these newbies to spend time with others in the group, including on the golf course.

5

Fifth, assume your newbie's need for extra help. Learning happens all the time, not just when we're assembled in intentional settings. Questions come at us all times of day. Who will answer your newbie's questions at midnight? As you find eager learners, be prepared to point them to helpful resources, such as online Bible dictionaries and commentaries. You might even combine these last two assumptions and pair up a newbie with a more experienced member of your group to research some of the common questions about Scripture or doctrinal topics. **What this means for a Fellowship leader:** Keep a working list of available resources that you would recommend to those who are looking to learn more. These should include a good study Bible with a concordance and a good Bible dictionary. Printed versions can then be augmented by helpful online sites, such as biblegateway.com, blueletterbible.org, and biblestudytools.com.

One phenomenon of learning is how it is accumulated. We learn some complicated things rather early in life and some rather simple things later. We don't learn things at the same time as our brother, sister, son, or daughter. When we come to understand this, we can give ourselves and others more latitude.

As you walk a newbie through the ascent to faith and fruitfulness, remember to maintain a welcoming, forgiving, and patient layer of support around this person. Top schoolteachers often greet every student by name as they come through the door. We can be equally generous with our welcome, always wanting to keep the conversation about Jesus going. Someday we will not be here to lead, and it may be one of these newbies, now quite experienced, who takes our place. Let's show them the way! 🙏