



# MORE THAN GOLFERS



LESSONS IN CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

BY JEFF HOPPER

**W**ith five others, I was standing on the backside of a serving table for a church picnic. My job was simple: add BBQ sauce to the plates as a final touch for those who wanted it. On this sunny day, I was wearing shorts, a tee shirt, and my white Titleist sunhat. A couple of places down from me was a woman serving pulled pork. During a break in the action, she said, “I like your hat. Do you play golf?”

*Do I play golf?!*

Understand that we’re a small church, pretty much everyone knows everyone, and I am an elder, so my life is not hidden. Yet this woman who had been with us for about three years was just finding out that I play golf. Honestly, I was proud of this! I had apparently broken the stereotype that golfers can’t talk about much more than golf.

As we know, stereotypes exist because they are true for at least some in the population. There are indeed golfers who only talk about golf. They wear their golf attire everywhere. They take golf weekends and golf weeks. Their families bury them with their golf accoutrements. It’s serious.

But here’s something else that’s true: Most everyone can turn the corner, whether they want to or not. Life changes come with or without warn-

ing, and golf suddenly takes a back seat (if it’s still riding along at all). Even the most ardent golfers ramp up their work hours, become caregivers, or come to grips with a painful loss; when they do, they begin to talk about other things.

Randy Wolff, a longtime Links Players staff and board member describes Links Fellowships as a place where people come together to talk about “important things.” Usually that means topics other than golf and bigger than golf. These are the topics that get people to examine their lives, especially in light of their relationships with God and others. As golfers that care about others beyond the game, changing the conversation to these important things, it’s good if we have a ready set of questions that honors the fullness of a golfer’s life and challenges them to open up in new ways about the life they live.

In the list below, we suggest opening and next-level questions in a variety of arenas. Not all of these questions are spiritual, but they will lead to better conversations, which allows you to get to know the other person below the surface and encourages them to trust you as one who is truly interested in their life. Our phrasing is usually just a suggestion; go with your own words as they fit you or the person you’re talking to.

## GOLF

**Basic:** Who introduced you to golf?

**A step up:** What do you find to be the most challenging part of the game?

**Deep:** Do you learn things from golf that inform other parts of your life?

## WORK

**Basic:** What kind of work do you do (did you do before you retired)?

**A step up:** What was the first job you ever had?

**Deep:** Have you ever had a boss ask you to do something you were uncomfortable doing?

## LOCAL TIES

**Basic:** Did you grow up in this area? (If not) When did you move here?

**A step up:** (If they grew up in the area) Do you have some special memories from growing up here? | (If they're newer to the area) What brought you here? Has the city/region delivered on your expectations?

**Deep:** Do you think there's value in building connections over time in an area?

## EDUCATION

**Basic:** Did you go to college? What did you study?

**A step up:** What did you learn in college that had little to do with the classroom?

**Deep:** Would you study something different if you went back to college now? (If so) Why would you make that change?

## MARRIAGE

**Basic:** Are you married? How long?

**A step up:** How did you meet your spouse? How long until you got married?

**Deep:** How do you know if your marriage is a good one?

## CHILDREN

**Basic:** Do you have any children? Grandchildren?

**A step up:** What was your favorite age when your kids were growing up?

**Deep:** (If kids are grown) Do you feel like you have much of an influence on your kids' lives today? Do they have much of an influence on your life? | (If kids are still at home) If you could get one big truth across to your kids as they grow up, what would it be?

## FAMILY OF ORIGIN

**Basic:** Are your parents still in your life? Do you have any siblings?

**A step up:** Do you have any relatives with whom you especially enjoy spending time?

**Deep:** Do you see things in other families that you wish you had in yours?

## HOBBIES

**Basic:** Do you have hobbies you enjoy besides golf?

**A step up:** Have you ever had to give up a hobby you really enjoyed?, or Is there some hobby you're still hoping to get a chance to try?

**Deep:** How do you decide how much money or time to put into your hobbies?

## RESTAURANTS

**Basic:** Do you like to eat out?

**A step up:** How do you find new places to try? What makes you stick with them?

**Deep:** Is eating with others an important part of building friendships for you?

## VACATIONS

**Basic:** Do you like to travel? What are some favorite places you like to go?

**A step up:** Have you ever gone to a place that ended up being far better or worse than you anticipated it would be?

**Deep:** Do you ever find transcendence when you travel, where the trip "takes you away" beyond just being in a different location?

## CHURCH

**Basic:** Do you go to church in town?

**A step up:** Did you go to church as a kid? How was that experience?

**Deep:** What role do you think churches need to play in the world today?

## COMMUNITY

**Basic:** How long have you lived in our city/region?

**A step up:** What are some of your favorite things about our city/region? What are some of its drawbacks?

**Deep:** What do you think keeps our leaders from improving the city/region the way we'd like? 🏡