



# Links Players

## The Journey of Faith - Defining Moments & New Desires

*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36: 26-27, ESV)*

In 1981 there was no hotter golfer in the world than Bill Rogers (AKA Panther). On top of winning The Open at Royal St. George's, he also won the Australian Open, beating Greg Norman by a shot. In total, he won four PGA events that same year.

What is often forgotten was his second-place finish to David Graham at U.S. Open at Merion Golf Club just a few months earlier. Appropriately, he was honored by being named the 1981 Player of the Year.

The hot streak didn't end there, either. He was in the final group on Sunday of the 1982 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach when Tom Watson famously chipped in on the par three 17th. He would graciously say, "The better player won that day." All in all, throughout 1981 and 1982, Bill Rogers "caught lightning in a bottle."

It would be easy to think that the 1981 Open win was the defining moment in his life. But that would be a mistake!

There is no question in anyone's mind that Bill Rogers earned and deserved proper recognition and acclaim for a stretch of golf only achieved by few. But, ask him or anyone close to him about the "defining moment" in his life, and he will tell you that moment occurred a few years earlier at the PGA Tour Bible Study.

At the invitation of Wally Armstrong, Don Massengale, and others, Bill joined several players who gathered to talk about their faith in Jesus Christ. He doesn't remember who gave the talk that night. But he remembers walking out into the parking lot after the meeting, raising his hands toward heaven, and asking Jesus to be his Lord and Savior.

From that moment on, Bill would say, "My desires dramatically changed." Of course, like many of us, there were ups and downs, forward motion and setbacks, and highs and lows. The lure of Tour life and all that it entailed would slow him down, but, in the end, neither Bill nor any of us can outrun the long arm of the Lord's love.

Christianity, at its roots, is not merely making moral improvements or external changes in behavior; rather, following Jesus Christ begins when, as Ezekiel prophesied, God supernaturally gives us a new heart. With a new heart comes new desires, and with new desires come new behaviors.

Jesus Christ is indeed our ultimate role model. However, the desire to be like him first requires a radical change in one's heart—the very center of our being. For that to occur requires someone other than ourselves to replace a "heart of stone with a heart of flesh." That someone is the risen and reigning King—Jesus Christ.

**Prayer: Jesus! We ask you to bring many thousands of men and women to yourself through the men and women of Links Fellowships.**

**READING** - Ezekiel 37:26-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 1 Peter 1: 3-5; John 3: 1-8.

**OPENING QUESTIONS:** have fun discussing long or semi-long streaks of "good golf."

1. Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophesy that there would be a new covenant with the coming of the Messiah. Read and discuss the elements promised in these verses, especially as they pertain to what happens to us in the new birth.

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2. In 1 Peter 1:3-5, Peter elaborates on being "born again" or the "new birth." Who causes this? How are Christians preserved or guarded?

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3. In John 3, John records an encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. What similarities do you see between Jesus' explanation of the new birth and Ezekiel and Jeremiah's promise?

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