



# Links Players

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## Spiritual Swing Adjustments

*...Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.... (Joel 2:13, ESV)*

If you stop by your clubhouse on March 5, you might see some golfers with a black cross on their forehead. This marks the beginning of Lent. They call it Ash Wednesday. For these golfers, Lent is a special time that enriches their worship and deepens their faith. Other Christians aren't so sure about Lent's meaning or value.

As a kid, I had some Catholic friends. Because they all had to give something up for Lent, they would ask me, "What are you giving up for Lent?" I'd say with a smirk, "Homework."

A few years back, GOLF magazine published a list of things golfers should give up for Lent. Things like mental errors, whining about the new rules, pulling the pin, moaning about course conditions, overthinking, excuses, and pride... realizing you're not quite Tour ready.

It never occurred to me that Lent was something I might actually be interested in, benefit from, or decide to keep or come to value as a way of getting to know God better.

Lent (Latin for "spring") is a six-week season in the Christian year prior to Easter. Technically, Lent comprises the 40 days before Easter, not counting Sundays. In the ancient church, Lent was a time for new converts to be instructed for baptism.

In time, all Christians came to see Lent as a season to be reminded of their need for repentance and to prepare spiritually for the celebration of Easter.

Part of this preparation involved the Lenten "fast," giving up something during Lent. In many Protestant churches, the emphasis is not so much on penitence and fasting as it is on intentional devotion to God. They sometimes add special Bible studies and prayer meetings to prepare members for a deeper experience of Good Friday and Easter.

Lent became a season to do something extra for God, not give something up. But, if you think of Lent as a season to earn God's favor by your good intentions or good works, then perhaps you need to first grow in your understanding of grace.

If, on the contrary, you see Lent as a time to grow more deeply in your spiritual life, then you'll be approaching Lent from a proper perspective.

I can't claim to have had any mystical experiences during Lent, but I have found that observing Lent either by giving up something or adding something to my spiritual disciplines has helped me focus more on God.

It has also helped me look ahead to Good Friday and Easter and to appreciate more deeply the meaning of the cross, the victory of the empty tomb, the depth of Christ's sacrifice, and to celebrate His victory over sin and death on Easter.

I encourage you to think about how, if at all, you want to participate in observing Lent. Let me be clear: Lent is not a requirement for Christians. If a certain spiritual discipline helps you grow in God's grace, then, by all means, do it. But if it doesn't, don't feel like you must. If Lent isn't your cup of tea, don't feel obligated to keep it.

**Prayer: Oh God, whatever I can give up or add for Lent will never match what you gave me in Christ. May I sense your call for me to know you better during this season of Lent? Make my journey to Easter one of grace, forgiveness and gentle love.**

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