



LINKS PLAYERS DAILY DEVOTIONAL

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## Tee It Up for Lent

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting...  
(Daniel 9:3)

And God Said, "Tee It UP!": Amusing and Thought-Provoking Parallels Between the Bible and Golf is the type of book friends and family buy me for Christmas.

Gary Graf explains "the many remarkable, mystical connections between sport and Spirit, links and Lord, game and God." He writes that he's neither a good golfer nor a biblical scholar, but a student "of scripture and sport."

The book has nineteen chapters—one for each hole on the course, plus the clubhouse. Each chapter begins with an analysis of a famous hole, then branches into related golf history and scripture. You read about some of golf's most celebrated courses and their designers, and you meet some of the greatest players in history.

Throughout each chapter, we find the Son of God teaching by word and example that the kingdom of God has already begun. Chapters such as "Augusta and Apostles," "The Amen Corner," "Golf and Bethlehem," "Clubs and Talents," and "The Sistine Chapel of Golf" draw the reader in.

The chapter on Payne Stewart and Palm Sunday made me think about the season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday. For many Christians, this is a time to grow in their relationship with God. Perhaps you might consider how, if at all, you want to participate in the observance of Lent.

When I was a kid, one of my friends asked, "What are you giving up for Lent?" I'd say "Homework." Lent was one of those practices my Roman Catholic friends observed. It never occurred to me that Lent was something I might actually be interested in, or benefit from, or decide to keep, or come to value as a way of getting to know God better.

Lent is a six-week season in the Christian year, preceding Easter. Technically, it comprises the 40 days before Easter, not counting Sundays. In the ancient church, Lent was a time for converts to be instructed for baptism. Over time, Christians came to see Lent as a season to be reminded of their need for repentance and to prepare spiritually for Easter.

Part of this preparation involved the Lenten "fast," giving up something intentionally as a devotion to God. Over the years, Protestant churches sometimes added special Lenten studies to help their members be primed for a deeper experience of Good Friday and Easter. Lent was a season to do something extra, not to give something up.

After ignoring Lent for most of my life, I've paid more attention to it over the past twenty-five years. Sometimes I've added extra devotional reading to my regular spiritual disciplines. I can't claim to have had any mystical experiences during Lent, but I have found that it has helped me focus on God and appreciate more deeply the meaning of the cross and the resurrection.

Let me be clear: Lent is not a requirement for Christians. Dallas Willard said, "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 do it." I'd say that if Lent helps you prepare for a deeper celebration of Good Friday and Easter and allows you to grow in God's grace, then keep it. If Lent isn't your cup of tea, don't feel obligated to participate.

**Prayer: Lord, may I use these days before Easter to cleanse my heart, strengthen my faith, and inspire acts of love and service as I consider your generosity, mercy, and grace.**

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Bill Crawford

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