

Golfing Ministry

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Playing golf can be an excellent mission field for the Christian golfer who wants to use his or her recreation to produce fruit for God's kingdom. The contacts and relationships which naturally occur while playing golf provide perfect opportunities to share the Good News of our Savior with those who might never hear it otherwise.

A golfing ministry can also assist the church in carrying out its commission to reach all people with Gospel by empowering its members who golf to be on mission on the course and in the clubhouse. A church could further enhance this ministry through providing chaplaincy programs and similar services to golfers and golf course personnel.

Further, a Christian golfing ministry can be a key through which new congregations can be started, and grown, in and around golfing communities. Christian golfers have access to settings that are often closed to outsiders.

If you are a golfer, you know how many people walk the fairways. When Christian golfers and their churches catch a vision for this ministry opportunity, thousands could be won to Christ.

This paper provides an introduction to the possibilities of a golfing ministry. It is based on the Christian Golfers Ministry manual, which was written to help Christian golfers and their churches carry out a golfing ministry. Christian Golfers Ministry is a membership organization whose purpose is to encourage and equip Christian golfers who seek effective ways to share Christ with fellow golfers and others on the fairways of life.

This material is one of the witnessing tools provided to help every golfer to share Christ in a relaxed manner. Members receive a number of other witnessing helps which include bag tags, logo towels, tees and ball markers with a witnessing message, tract cards and bag Bibles. All of these items are marked with an acrostic that tells of God's Good News in Jesus Christ:

God—"The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us" (John 1:14, CEV).

Offers—"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them" (John 3:17, CEV).

Love—"God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never die" (John 3:16, CEV).

Forgiveness—"No one who has faith in God's Son will be condemned. But everyone who does not have faith in him has already been condemned for not having faith in God's only Son" (John 3:18, CEV).

Eternal—"Everyone who has faith in the Son has eternal life. But no one who rejects Him will ever share in that life, and God will be angry with them forever" (John 3:36, CEV).

Redemption—"God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die" (John 3:16, CEV).

Will you consider joining with us to help those who play the game discover how to walk the fairways of life with Christ!

Start sharing Christ every time you tee up!

THE FRONT NINE

Your Personal Witness

NUMBER ONE

Teeing Up the Ball

As a golfer you must always approach the tee with the attitude that you are going to get off to a great start. When you expect great things to happen, you have half the battle won!

Being prepared to hit that first shot is so important. You select your club, remove a ball, and a tee. You then walk up to the tee box. You have with you everything needed to hit the shot.

When you share a witness for Christ on the golf course or anywhere you must have everything you need to do so. We provide some personal tools that can help you begin the conversation about Christ. When they are used properly they will actually have you being asked rather than you having to start the conversation. However, if you don't go prepared to share Christ you will not have the opportunity, just as if you walk to the tee box without a club, ball and tee you will not be able to tee off.

The most important personal witnessing tool you have is your story of what Christ has done in your life. Christ has done something positive in every Christian's life. Be prepared to tell your story—know it well. Write down a summary of your encounter and walk with Christ. From that, work out a two to three minute story of what Christ means to you.

NUMBER TWO

The Drive

The drive is a very important shot. It sets the tone of the whole game. Some people hit long pretty drives and others hit short, sometimes not so pretty, drives. Many teaching pros will tell you that you should take a low and slow swing as you drive. Always look at the ball and be smooth with your swing.

The way in which you approach people about their relationship with Christ will most of the time set the tone for the whole opportunity. It can be long and impressive or short and sweet without using big words or stories. The end result is what counts, which is the ability to get started.

One example of how to get started is the use of the personal witnessing tools you brought with you. Your bag tag or towel will create the conversation. Most likely, those you are playing with, meet on the putting green, or greet in the clubhouse will see the GOLFER acrostic on your bag. They may then ask: What does that mean? Why do you carry that? Where did you get this?

All these questions, as well as others, open a door for you to begin to share Christ. Maybe they don't know our Savior, which means you are open to share more about Him. Maybe they have fallen away from serving Him, which means you are open to encourage them.

Maybe they are Christians who may need a way to share Christ through their sport, which means you have spread the message with a new member who can share his or her faith.

Be prepared to share with them not just that you are a part of Christian Golfers Ministry, but how God offered to you love, forgiveness and eternal security.

When you use the acrostic, explain what it means. The following Scripture passages can help you as you share your faith:

John 1:1—God always was, is and will be.

John 1: 12, 3:3, 6:29—He cares for us no matter what.

John 3:16—He gave His all because He loves us.

John 3:17,21, 8:12—He wants us to repent and seek forgiveness.

John 5:24, 10:27-29, 11:25-26, 14:1-3—He wants to have eternal fellowship with man.

When using the acrostic, always refer back to John 3:16 as the proof God gives to all of us!

If they don't ask you, then show them your Christian concern with your personal attitude during play. Also, say, "Did you notice my bag tag?" or "Have you ever heard of CGM?" Both of these inquiries can lead to the same conversations mentioned above.

NUMBER THREE

Preparing for the Second Shot

When you have engaged a person in conversation you will then be able to talk with them about our Lord. Remember, nothing is more important than your personal story. Prepare yourself and the person by asking simple questions. "Do you attend church?" or "Tell me about your church." These questions will open up feelings and let you know something about their relationship with the Lord. Always remember, people like to hear themselves talk, so let them talk! They may in turn ask you the same questions.

NUMBER FOUR

Hitting the Approach Shot

Once you have some idea of their relationship with the Lord, then you can close in on your approach. When hitting the approach shot to the green, we often walk up to see what the green looks like: how big it is and where the pin placement should be. You have done just that with Number Three. Now, begin to key in on that person's needs. Share with them the acrostic. Let them know that Christ offers them love, forgiveness and eternal redemption.

Listen to them. They may have some experience in their past that has caused them to fall away from God or church. Be considerate of their concerns and share the *positive* things that have happened in your life and church.

NUMBER FIVE

Watching Out for the Hazards

Hazards are a part of playing the game. Very few golfers play a full 18 holes of golf that don't end up in a hazard on the course. It may be that large pond you are not sure you can hit over. It may be a slice where you lost control, and your ball went deep in the woods. It

might be that shot you hooked out of bounds. Hazards will most likely create a penalty. They don't always need to cost you your game.

When a person throws you in a hazard, don't panic. Panic always leads to a bad shot. Listen to their objection. Evaluate where you are and what is the best way to get back in the fairway. Maybe you should take a drop (regroup and start over). Maybe you should hit out to a safe place so that your next shot can be on line.

Always remember that you may be talking with someone who has never had a relationship with Christ. "He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God" (John 8:47, NIV). To prepare your life for hazards when sharing Christ, read John 15:18-21.

NUMBER SIX

Approaching the Green

The walk to the green is sometimes a relief. You are finally at the place where you can finish the hole and total the score. On the green you will putt the ball and attempt to get it in the hole—your ultimate goal! Sometimes your ball may end up on the heart of the green, other times out on the fringe. But as you go to the final steps, always remember you have arrived. This is what you worked toward.

Much in the same way a person may begin to show real interest in what you have shared with them. They have expressed an interest in knowing more about Christ or about growing in faith or about church relationships. *You have arrived!* The door is now open for you to finish what you started.

NUMBER SEVEN

Preparing to Putt

Many golfers agree that this is the most skilled part of the game. Some golfers "one putt." Some "two, three, or four putt." Here your game can be won or lost. A total score can be improved, or blown away.

Golfers who care always look over the situation. They look to see the shape of the green. Will their ball break right or left, up or down, or straight into the hole?

We must do the same when sharing Christ. Remember, your goal is to get the ball in the hole with as few strokes as possible. Try not to hit it too hard or too soft. Christ never called anyone or sent anyone out without knowing the situation. Listen to the person and know where they are. They may be ready to accept Christ like a straight-in-putt. They may be a little left or right, up or down. Take your time. Get ready.

NUMBER EIGHT

Sinking the Putt

The definition of "putt" in the dictionary is "a light golf stroke made on the putting green in an effort to place the ball in the hole."

Now is the time to "ask for the sale." In the age old schools of witnessing we have always said you never get what you don't ask for. In the quiet moment on the green you simply finish the job, asking, "Do you know Christ? Is Jesus your Lord? Have you ever considered serving Christ with all your heart?"

This is much like putting. Putting could be the hardest part. You need courage, energy, and the peace of God to help you here! When they respond, then you can respond. Be willing to listen. Explain the promise of John 3:16 and the change Christ has made in your life. Take a moment to pray with them in your own words and their own words for Christ to come into their heart and control their life.

NUMBER NINE

Retrieving the Ball from the Hole!

You have reached your goal—the ball is now in the hole. Christ never healed a person or called a person that He didn't ask to do something: Pick up your bed, go out, follow me!

You must go to the hole and get your ball in order to continue to play the game. Go to the next tee and be ready for the next opportunity to share the Savior that others might walk the "fairways of life" with the peace and joy you have. Give the new or renewed Christian a copy of the booklet of John, so that they may grow in the Spirit. Keep up with them and help them grow as they locate a place of worship and spiritual growth.

THE BACK NINE

Your Church on Mission

NUMBER TEN

Deciding to Play

After a tough front nine often the golfers rest between sides and then wonder if they even wish to play the back nine. In this game however, it is very important that we play the back nine. In order to do so, we must get our heads together and prepare to finish strong.

I have seen golfers go to the clubhouse between nines and ask the pro for a pointer or two to help improve their game on the back. The steps which follow are ones which will involve a church in the mission ministry of golf.

As we prepare to play this side we must first have played the front. A church must have individual golfers committed to the personal witnessing effort. Then a church gathers those people and commissions them to carry out this very important ministry. Get your whole church involved by allowing it to vote to include this ministry in its mission efforts. Include a chairperson on Church Council, if possible, to continue to report and update the church on new ministry efforts from your golf ministry.

When this is finished, continue to train and improve your ministry with workshops, fellowship and outreach opportunities.

NUMBER 11

Choosing a Foursome

When we plan to go out and play a round of golf we look for someone to go and play with us. This is also true of setting up an ongoing ministry in your church. Always recruit and train new members into the ministry. Like everything else we do in the church, the more who are involved the more you can do for Christ. One idea is to have a monthly golf outing with the people involved. Talk after the round about new ways to witness and include others in your ministry. This fellowship will bring strength and energy to your ministry.

NUMBER 12

Reserving a Tee Time

At many larger courses you must have a set time to get started. This is also true in setting up your golf ministry. Set a target date to have the training, supplies, and interested people together so that you may get off to a good start. Talk with this group and set goals for the ministry: Who will we focus on; what area (course) will we focus on; how many people can we involve? Then look at the overall purposes of the golf ministry. Know them, study them and incorporate them into your ministry.

NUMBER 13

Enjoying the Fellowship

Golf can create the best possible fellowship. When you play 18 holes of golf with a person, you get to know them very well. Many churches already have annual tournaments which include inviting non-Christians. Why not expand that opportunity? Golfers who love to play will play in 6-8 tournaments a year which are sponsored by all types of groups from charities to beverage companies. Why can't your church work with a course to sponsor a tournament open to the public? Provide at that tournament some of the personal witnessing tools as tournament gifts. Sponsor an outing to give out the awards and during that share a testimony and information concerning your church. When your church sponsors anything it should be for the purpose of uplifting Christ. You can certainly do so at a public golf tournament.

There are hundreds of ideas. Let's share and talk about more of them, but remember it is the ongoing use of the personal tools and sharing your story that will make the difference in golfers' lives.

NUMBER 14

Expanding the Opportunity

Ministries that do not grow and expand tend to die! So it is with your church's golf ministry. You should include playing golf as a part of your gift search when talking with new and prospective members. You have a ministry they can plug into immediately.

Promote the ministry to other churches. They may not know what to do and would invite your help or the help of CGM to get started.

As a church we are always looking for opportunities to start a new and needed work. As the turn of the century approaches, we know that churches and church attendance are changing factors. One main purpose of leisure ministry concepts is to meet the needs of salvation, spiritual growth, and worship opportunities in a fast changing world. Your church should consider things like holding vespers at a course on Sunday morning, the need for a weekly Bible study at a course, or even a church/congregation mission which might meet at a golf course anytime during the week. Consider times other than Sunday morning. This is one of the busiest times at a course and facilities are used to the maximum. How about Thursday night or afternoon? Our purpose is to reach people where they are and when they are willing. Be creative! You may just end up being the sponsoring church of a great and growing mission!!

NUMBER 15

Playing the Hole

Playing the hole is the carrying out of the game. It is important that the golfer and the church have a sincere desire to share Christ with others. Can you think of how well you play golf or do anything when you really don't desire to do it? Make your commitment to "play the hole." Your church should always envision long-range possibilities and the individual golfer should look for each and every opportunity to share Christ.

NUMBER 16

Staying Out of the Hazards

As we said on the front nine, hazards can create a renewed opportunity or create more conflict trying to get out! Remember that there are some hazards any time a church tries something new and different. Educate your church. Keep them informed and you will avoid many of the hazards on the course of this ministry.

The sand trap is a place where you can become bogged down on a very small or short shot. When in a trap you must hit the ball just right in order to get out. Remember, these hazards are very close to the green (your goal). Use the right club, the right swing, and you will soon achieve your goal. Don't hit at the ball without thinking it through or you will miss the ball (the point of conflict) and end up right back in the trap again.

When your ball goes astray (and it does sometimes), you may end up in the woods or rough. Often you can have a clear and clean shot out of the rough without much trouble. If that is the case, pick your club wisely and take your best shot. If you don't have a shot, many times you are better off to pick the ball up, take a stroke and continue play from a better lie (position). Don't be too proud to start over or improve your position if it can make a difference in your whole game.

If you hit in the water, most of the time your ball is lost. Your only choice may be to drop a new ball and start from a point of play. Don't try to fish out a ball from the middle of the lake or you will get wet! Don't try to hit a ball lying in the water, you will get wet and the ball may not even move!!

The greatest dream for water hazards on a golf course would be to someday attend a baptismal service being held at the pond on a beautiful fairway! What a thought!!

NUMBER 17

Totaling Your Score

By the time you reach the seventeenth hole, most golfers have a real good idea how they played. They sometimes begin to total their score and find out what they must do on the next two holes. Your church should always be aware of what the ministry is doing and seeking new opportunities for growth. If it works, keep doing it day after day. If it doesn't work, talk about it and be willing to change.

NUMBER 18

Improving Your Game

After each game golfers evaluate how they played. Some may even take a lesson from a pro, read something on how to improve, or go to that old driving range and just hit balls until they feel it is right. As a church starting a golf ministry, remember that this ministry is designed to involve the individual golfer in sharing Christ, to develop new work in and around golf courses and communities, and to lift the name of Christ in all we do. These are

great and worthy causes. Always be willing to learn and share what you have learned. Be open to new ideas and willing to try them for the cause of Christ. Remember what Jesus said: "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgement is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30, NIV).

We must always work as a team at any ministry in our church, not just to please ourselves, but also to please the one who sent us out to share his LOVE, FORGIVENESS, and ETERNAL REDEMPTION!

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