

WHERE'S YOUR HEART TODAY?

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. (1 Peter 1:22, NIV)

TEXAS HAS ONE. SO DO MISSOURI AND VIRGINIA. Likely there are more. If you play golf with your spouse, one of these might be the place to be today, for the courses at Mill Creek, Teetering Rocks, and Rock Harbor all feature greens in the shape of a heart. It is, after all, Valentine's Day.

Maybe you gave up a long time ago on romance. You'll be glad to know we're not here to recite sonnets or set you to calling 1-800-FLOWERS (it's probably too late for that!). But we do want to take note of Scripture's many exhortations to love.

If you are involved in regular Christian community, you are aware of the "one anothers." These are the encouragements in the Bible to treat each other well—live in peace with one another, be devoted to one another, honor one another, forgive one another, confess your sins to one another, offer hospitality to one another. The list contains more than 20 different charges. But there is one command that recurs again and again in the New Testament, beginning with Jesus and stretching through the letters of the apostles: "Love one another."

In Peter's first letter, however, this challenge seems to be heightened, for there we read that we are to love one another "deeply" and "from the heart." This is no romantic sentiment that can be accomplished with a box of chocolates, a bouquet of flowers, or even a shiny new putter. This is a challenge that requires us to really consider what it means to go about the business of loving others.

The Greek translated "deeply" suggests a real fervency. It shares its root with a verb that means to stretch out one's hand. While this carries the picture of servanthood, it more literally indicates tension. We are to love intensely, not casually—in the same way that we would apply our faith to God.

Peter's original readers would also have understood the many nuances that come attached to the word *heart*. It was to them "the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors" (blueletterbible.org). You might call it our "all in all."

Biblically speaking, love is far more than sentiment. It is a resolved regularity of action in the direction of others. It is giving to others what God has given to us.

Opening questions What is the most unusual feature you have ever encountered on the golf course? Do you think such features add to or detract from your overall experience as a golfer?

READING Romans 5:8, 1 John 3:16-18, Romans 12:9-21

God's love

In Romans 5:8, how are we told that God displayed his love for us? What claim does God then have on us in charging us to love one another?

Actions and truth

What actions and truth do you think John was speaking of in his letter commanding us to love one another? What makes actions more powerful (and more loving) than words alone?

The outworking of love

In Romans 12, what specific demonstrations of love are provoked in Paul's writing? Which among these present a real challenge for you?
