

OPEN HEARTS

He will have pity on the poor and helpless and save the lives of the poor. He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious in his sight. (Psalm 72:13-14, HCSB)

OPEN CHAMPIONSHIPS—WHETHER FOR MEN OR FOR WOMEN, for seniors or flatbellies, and no matter which side of the Pond—welcome the attempts of any and all. You have to demonstrate, by way of your handicap index, an existing aptitude for the game, but you don't have to be a professional or even a well-known amateur. You just have to put up the entry fee and fire good scores on the right days. Then you're in—even if you're only 11 years old (Lucy Li) or it has been 18 years since your last appearance (Fran Quinn).

We have ways of closing up the game. Clubs welcome those who can pay, collegiate teams those who can play. A personal confession: If you're dilly-dallying on the course, I'm going to talk about you—albeit from 200 yards away—like you don't belong.

Actually, we tend to do this kind of thing in all walks of life. We may live in a society where everyone has a place, but we want to be the ones who get to tell others whether their place is.

Certainly, parameters have their purpose. I don't want a child with a set of doctor's toys entering my room in the ER and saying, "Now what have we here?" And if the best you can do is sketch out some stick figures (another personal confession), the curators do well to keep from hanging your "art" in the local gallery.

But the kingdom of God is exceedingly open. It reaches those who are too often unreached. And it does so because these are the people on God's heart.

When the psalmist sang that the poor are precious in the sight of God, he was not offering an isolated truth. God's concern for the disheartened, disdained, and disenfranchised repeatedly jumps off the pages of Scripture. If we avoid it, we choose not to identify with a consistent refrain of God's love.

God's people were designed to reflect God himself. Admittedly (remember those personal confessions?), we don't always do this very well. But if this failure is for want of trying, then we need to reset our heart's course. We need to engage in loving those he loves, no matter how different they are from us.

Opening questions Who are some of your favorite players to watch in the major championships? Do you root for Cinderella stories? • Whom do you find hardest to love in the world around you?

READING Deuteronomy 24:17-22, Isaiah 1:16-20, Luke 21:1-4

The needy among us

In Deuteronomy 24, Moses reminded the people of the heart of God. Whom did God list among the needy? How did God direct his people to care for the needy? What reason did he give them for doing this?

Care in the system

Isaiah's early words recognized the needs of the oppressed in unjust systems (1:17). What is the context in which this verse was set? How is the way we contend for the disenfranchised reflective of the way we demonstrate obedience to God (and thus adherence to his heart)?

An unexpected lesson

What did Jesus point out about the widow to provide a lesson to his disciples? Give an example of a time you learned a lesson from an unexpected source.
