

ARE YOU QUALIFIED? 1: THE NATURE OF QUALIFIERS

...many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. (Mark 2:15, NIV)

I'M NOT SURE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW ABOUT MONDAY QUALIFIERS. On the tours, these are 18-hole free-for-alls occurring at the beginning of each week before open events. Normally four spots are left available for the low scorers from these Monday sprints.

Four is a promising number if only six or eight golfers enter. But Monday qualifiers typically are loaded with a hundred players and more. A few of these are local club pros or hopeful amateurs looking to catch lightning for a day. Many more, though, are those on the fringes—men or women who have possessed tour privileges or have even won on tour in the past. Hungry youth are paired with hangers-on in a meet-up of mismatched relatives, all looking to authenticate their golf DNA.

What does it take to emerge from a qualifier like this and gain a spot in that week's tournament field? Usually something in the mid- to low-60s. Good luck!

It is one thing for a sport at its highest level to demand such excellence and eliminate the pretenders or those even just a little bit off their game. But can we say the same of the kingdom of God? How narrow, really, is the narrow road?

If the Pharisees despised anything in particular about Jesus' daily life, it was that he seemed to have too much fun. He was feasting when they were fasting, and his usual companions were not those known for being "early to bed and early to rise" (to put it nicely). So when Jesus had his first interaction with Levi, a tax collector (aka, Roman consort, reprobate, thief, etc.), joining him for dinner, the time was ripe for criticism of Jesus' choice in friends. This reached beyond a few harmless fishermen. Jesus was happily hanging out with sinners.

You see, the kingdom road is not narrow in terms of those allowed to walk it. Rogues and religionists are all welcome. Rather its narrowness is found in the singularity of the one who paves it: Christ is his name. He's willing to throw in his lot with you, but you must decide whether to throw in your lot with him.

What if I told you the qualifier is not what you shoot but whether you've signed up for the right event—the one with the most benevolent sponsor? Enter, friend, and win.

Opening questions What is the most nerve-racking golf event or match you have ever played? What made it this way? • Do you recall a time in your life when you felt left out for no good reason?

READING Mark 2:13-17, Romans 5:6-11, Romans 15:1-2

Jesus, friend of sinners (Mark 2)

What was the difference between the way the Pharisees viewed the world and the way Jesus viewed it? Is there room for you to be counted among Jesus' friends?

Christ's paving the way (Romans 5)

What did Jesus do for us that others would not? What effect did that act have on those who throw in their lot with him?

Qualifying each other (Romans 15)

Beyond Jesus' qualifying us for the kingdom, we are obligated to continue qualifying one another for work in that kingdom. In what way does this passage spur on such encouragement among us? Specifically, how might we have to "not please ourselves" in order to support others?
