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Open Hearts (Serving - Chapter 10)

n/a
Ready:
By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:35

Set

For nearly 30 years, Betsy King spent the majority of her time on the golf course. In most people's opinion—whether sports analysts or average fans—she did some pretty significant things in a career that resulted in 34 LPGA Tour event titles, 6 major championships, and inductions into the World Golf Hall of Fame (1995) and the LPGA Hall of Fame (2000).

Yet while King was racking up every accolade available within the realm of professional women's golf, a nagging doubt lingered about the importance of her role as an athlete and what life after sports might look like. Those thoughts were intensified after she read the book *Half Time: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance* by Bob Buford.

"The book is about how you spend the first half of your life building your security and then you spend the second half of your life doing something significant," King says. "When I was playing on the tour, I always wondered what I was going to do next. I didn't know what God wanted me to do after the tour. I had a hard time thinking about that."

Questions about a future away from golf were the furthest things from King's mind as a teenage girl growing up in the mid-sized town of Redding, Pennsylvania, about an hour's drive northwest of Philadelphia. The daughter of a physician, she was eight years old when she started playing the game at a country club where her parents were members. As King entered high school, she also developed an interest in field hockey, softball and basketball. She took her love of sports to Furman University in South Carolina, where she was a three-sport athlete. As a senior, she focused solely on golf, which propelled her to the professional ranks.

Previous to her time on the LPGA Tour, King was raised in a stereotypical religious home. She attended church every week and went to Sunday School. But King realized later in life that something was missing.

"We went to a mainline church where they didn't really talk about a personal relationship with Christ," King says. "Even though I learned some of the Bible stories, it was about more than knowing the stories, and I don't think I really understood. Yeah, I knew that Jesus died for the sin of the world, but I didn't personalize the fact that Jesus died for my sin."

King's spiritual paradigm slowly began to shift in December 1979 when Bill Lewis—founder of

the FCA Golf Ministry—invited her to an FCA Pro-Am fund-raising event. Lewis was also from Redding and organized player-led Bible studies. He also had a book ministry that gave the golfers access to a wide array of Christian books and Bibles. A month later, King (who had been on the tour since 1977) attended a retreat for LPGA golfers called Tee Off, and it was there that she experienced God in a brand-new way.

“I didn’t make a profession of faith or commit my life to Christ until January 1980,” King says. “Bruce Wilkinson was the speaker at the LPGA Fellowship retreat. There were maybe 30 of us there and he gave the chance to accept Christ after one of his talks.”

Wilkinson, founder of the popular Walk Through the Bible Ministries, would go on to write the bestselling book *The Prayer of Jabez*. King would move on to achieve greatness on the LPGA Tour. She won the U.S. Open in 1989 and 1990 and claimed the LPGA Championship in 1992. King also won the Women’s British Open in 1985, which at the time had yet to be declared a major.

King was also a stalwart of the United States Solheim Cup team, which competes biennially against the best golfers from Europe. She helped her team to victories in 1990, 1994, 1996 and 1998 and was part of the runner-up team in 1992. King was also honored to serve as the team captain in 2007 when the U.S. team defeated the Europeans 16-12 in Halmstad, Sweden. Other awards that she stockpiled over her 28-year career include Rolex Player of the Year (1984, 1989 and 1993) as well as the Vare Trophy (1987 and 1993), which is given to the golfer with the lowest scoring average for the season.

After accepting Christ and subsequently getting more involved with the LPGA Fellowship, King made a natural progression toward community outreach and ministry. Although she participated in service projects while part of a high-school group called the Brotherhood Club, the concept of orchestrated serving was relatively new.

“Through the fellowship, we had some opportunities to serve,” King says. “We did several Habitat for Humanity projects. We started by going to the mountains of Tennessee and working on houses there. Chris Stevens—who leads the Fellowship on the LPGA Tour—is from Knoxville, and this area was about an hour from Knoxville. We also spearheaded a project in Arizona one winter, in Guadalupe; and we raised the funds to build a house. We worked on the house for two weeks, and during that time, we probably had 80 players that came, between caddies and players and LPGA staff.”

King also worked with Stevens and Drive for Life, which helped raise funds for a village in Tanzania. She traveled to Romania in 1993 and 1994 to visit orphanages and assist an adoption agency seeking to place children with American families. King has also traveled to Korea and Japan, where she shared her testimony with various golf groups, and she has consistently participated in FCA golf camps as well.

In January 2005, King went to Honduras with LPGA golfer Hilary Lunke (and her husband, Tyler) to help build houses with World Vision, a humanitarian organization for which she has the utmost respect and admiration. Her association with the group has also helped her identify a greater understanding of serving.

“Serving is helping others without any expectations in return,” King says. “I think about Mother Teresa. She helped people without any expectations. World Vision is a Christian organization, but it’s not like every time they go to serve someone, there’s an expectation that they have to

share their faith. They work in some countries where it's illegal to share your faith, but they are serving in the name of Christ because Christ called us to serve. If those opportunities arise, if someone asks, 'Why are you doing this?' then they can say, 'It's because of my love of Christ.'"

King also points to the example of Christ Himself, who first served the people's physical needs before speaking to their spiritual needs, with no prerequisites or demands to be met first.

"You can't go to someone who is starving to death and not help them physically and still expect them to want to listen to a message of Christ," claims King. "That's like saying, 'God loves you and I love you, but I'm not willing to help you.'"

As she continued to learn about serving, it became clear that her competitive golf career was nearing its end. In June 2005, her father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Just three months later, he passed away. King was then faced with the challenge of caring for her mother who suffered with Alzheimer's disease until she passed away in April 2007. In addition to handling these family crises, King was dealing with personal wear and tear, the natural result of nearly 30 years on the LPGA Tour. She retired in 2005, and shoulder surgery in 2006 effectively sealed the deal.

But that same year, King discovered new life within the golfing world when she was selected to be the 2007 U.S. team captain at the prestigious Solheim Cup—the women's equivalent of the Ryder Cup. She was a natural fit for the head-to-head competition, having previously played in the event five times herself. And this time, it was going to be about much more than the game of golf.

"I decided I wanted to use that platform to do something," King reveals. "I read a book called *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities of Our Time* by Jeffrey Sachs. So I called Dana Buck, my contact at World Vision and told him I wanted to do something, and I felt like I was being led to do something in Africa. He told me I needed to go over there, and they were putting together a group of women to go over there. So I ended up going there in 2006."

After an exploratory trip that took King to Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia, she returned with the inspiration for a nonprofit organization appropriately named Golf Fore Africa. The organization's purpose is "to raise funds and awareness within the golf community to help those who have been infected or are affected by AIDS." The LPGA lent its support to King's first project in Rwanda, and to date close to $200,000 in donations have been collected.

"So basically, we exist to be a fund-raising body to help people who are already on the ground doing the work," King says. "We'll go over there to make sure that what we've raised is being used effectively. But the most effective thing to do is to give your money to help those that are there that have the expertise. That's a part of service."

"I'm being an advocate," she continues. "I can speak out. I've gone and seen it firsthand, and I think that's why they want us to go. That's what God calls us to do. It's like when Jesus healed the paralytic who wanted to stick around with Him, He said, 'No, go home, and tell your family what God's done for you and how He's had mercy on you.' That's what I feel I'm called to do too—to talk about what I've seen and to be an advocate for those people."

For King, it's become quite personal. Because of her experiences in Africa, it's more to her than just helping strangers in a strange land. King has met with men, women and children

impacted by disease, poverty and war. Those one-on-one human connections have fueled her passion to serve the ones that Jesus referred to in Matthew 25:40 as “the least of these.”

“We helped one woman who was 24 years old and was blind,” King shares. “She was the head of her household, and she had five siblings. World Vision was providing seeds so that she could plant Irish potatoes in her little plot of land. So we basically did that. We had all of the villagers watching us and laughing at us and then some of the women jumped in and helped us with the hoeing, and they had the babies strapped on their backs. But in that situation, it’s more about good will. There’s a language barrier, and yet you’re showing them that you care. I think that brings dignity to people. What we heard when we met with people was that we came all that way to see them and that showed we cared about them.”

King has learned that serving can show the love of Jesus to others without the use of one single word. She has also discovered that taking others along for the ride can have a similar impact and open the door for evangelism. Not all of the people King has brought to Africa have been believers, and some who believe have a level of faith that is evident but not fully developed. In both instances, King has been amazed at how powerful the nature of serving others opens the hearts of those tag-along servants.

“When you have people like professional golfers who make these trips, they’re getting a lot of their needs met,” King says. “You’re bringing them into a cause that’s bigger than them. That often gives you an opportunity to share your faith. It changes their heart. It’s a common ground where you can come together. The people that went with us to Africa, most of them weren’t believers. So you’re putting them in a situation where they get to see Christians who are different, and they’re helping people, and that just might be the introduction that takes them a step along the way.”

Not only does King hope to put a dent in many of Africa’s problems, but she would also love to see the next generation of servants rise up and get involved with similar worthy and life-changing causes. “When you see what other people are going through,” she says, “it tends to put your life in perspective.”

For instance, in Rwanda, King saw the tragic results of poverty and AIDS set against a hideous backdrop of war and genocide. She met one Rwandan employed by World Vision who had lost 70 members of her family to the genocide. Amazingly, this woman had courageously moved forward to accept a position titled Head of Healing, Peace and Reconciliation.

“People who come to Rwanda think they have a lot of problems,” King says. “But when they see what the people there have to forgive, it makes their problems seem small. I mean they have to forgive the people that have killed their families and their friends that are now coming back into society, and they’re living next to them. That’s what they’re facing now. There are so many things that you learn through serving.”

King has also seen the positive impact that the United States government has facilitated through a $30 billion pledge made by President George W. Bush in 2003. She was pleased to hear the president commit an additional $30 billion for AIDS during the 2008 State of the Union address. Because of King’s captaincy with the winning Solheim Cup team, she actually had the chance to thank President Bush in person.

As pleased as she was to see that kind of compassion coming from the White House, King

has been even more gratified by her opportunity to work alongside and generate support for the unsung heroes of this battle against social injustice.

“I am so inspired by the faith of the Christians who are there every day in the midst of the poverty, trying to make a difference,” King says. “I think you’re just inspired by those you’re serving or those you’re serving with—inspired by the beauty of the people. You definitely get a lot more back than what you give.”

King can’t always explain how it works; all she knows is that it does. Somehow, the principle of serving others ultimately allows those being served to see the love of Jesus shining through. This concept is exemplified in John 13:35 when Jesus teaches His followers, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

That passage, coupled with the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves (see Matthew 22:39), is all the convincing King needs to continue her effort to change the world through compassion and serving.

“I just feel called by God to do this,” King says. “When I didn’t know what I’d do after the tour, God answered that question for me. He brought me to this place. You give whatever talents you have to help others. For me, that’s using the golf expertise that I had and the reputation or notoriety that I had to help. Obviously, God has equipped each one of us to have a part in that service.

“As believers, we’re all called to serve. We’re all called to witness, to share our story. We’re also called to be a part of the community of believers. But He also calls us to a life of service. So really, if you want to be obedient, you need to be serving.”

Go

1. Betsy King talks about the need for security versus the struggle for significance. How important is security (financial, relational, spiritual) to you? What does “significance” mean to you? How often do you find yourself thinking about being a person of significance?
2. King refers to Mother Teresa and the humanitarian organization World Vision when talking about serving without expectations. Why should you expect nothing in return when serving others? What are some ways that Jesus demonstrated this philosophy throughout His ministry of healing and teaching?
3. Read Matthew 25:31-46. This prophetic passage is the tale of two kinds of people: the righteous and the self-righteous. For these two groups, what was the difference between eternal life and eternal punishment? What imagery comes to mind when you hear the phrase “the least of these”? What does the extremity between Jesus’ two responses tell you about God’s emphasis on serving those in need?
4. Read John 13:35. How do Jesus’ words in this passage contrast with what many non-believers think of today’s church body? Why is it important for us to show love to one another as well as to those outside of the church walls?
5. What are some ways that serving can change the heart of the servant? How can serving open the hearts of those being served? Can you describe a time when you’ve seen one or both of these scenarios played out in your own acts of service?

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Bible Reference:
John 13

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