

Stay in Love with God – Part 1

August 6, 2018

John 21:15-17, 19



At a point in our faith journey, we decide that Jesus is who we want to cast our lot with. We come to the place of confessing Jesus as Lord and we commit our lives to following Him. In the passage from John 17 that we will read tonight, this is what Peter and the other disciples have done. They have left home and family and all else to follow the Messiah. As professing Christians, we each have made the choice for Jesus. Although we have not left all for Him, we can count the cost. Once we make this decision we become what you might call "born again". We are filled with the Holy Spirit and we begin to try and live a Christian life. In the language of this sermon series, we begin to practice Wesley's first two rules: do not harm and do good. We have fleshed these "rules" out and tonight we turn to the third rule: stay in love with God. Let us pray...

Once we "find Jesus" our life and outlook on life are radically different. In those first few weeks or months, we are "on fire" for Jesus. Can you remember what it was like to be "on fire" for Jesus? I can remember how I wanted to share Jesus with everyone I met. I thought Jesus was the greatest gift I had ever received, and I couldn't get enough of my Bible and of church. Jesus was a gift that I wanted others to have a well. This is where Peter and the other disciples were right up until the end of what is now known as Holy Week. They had lived and learned from Jesus and had gone out and preached and healed in His name. This wonderful ride seemed to be culminating as the parade made its way into

Jerusalem. The people lay down palms and cried out "Hosanna"! Can you relate to how the disciples must have felt in those days just prior to the arrest and crucifixion? Can you remember when you were "on fire" for Jesus? That's where the disciples were as the parade would its way into Jerusalem. Let's take a couple of minutes to discuss these two questions:

1) What was it like when you were first in love with Jesus? How did it feel?

2) What changed? How did your faith feel different after the "fire" cooled down a bit?



- 1) What was it like when you were first in love with Jesus? How did it feel?
- 2) What changed? How did your faith feel different after the "fire" cooled down a bit?

The reality is that for most Christians, though, at some point, we set our faith on cruise control. We do lose that fire or passion and begin to simply go through the motions. Tonight, we will talk about staying in love with God. To do so, to stay in love with God, we have to do more than hitting the cruise control button.

To put our minds in the proper place for considering how we stay in love with God, let me ask you to consider a different set of questions. First, what do you do to stay in love with your spouse or significant other? And, second, what do they do to stay in love with you?

In our relationships with those who we love, we must put in effort to “keep the fires burning” – to stay in love. Wesley knew that to stay in love with God, Christians would need to do certain things as well. In the original language of John Wesley, this concept of staying in love with God was “practicing the ordinances of God”. The practices that Wesley thought essential to staying in



love with God are public worship, hearing the Word proclaimed, holy communion, personal and corporate prayer, meditation on the Word, and fasting. Although this is



like a list, Wesley never meant for these practices to be like a checklist. Yes, went to church on Monday. Yup, got up on Tuesday and read my Bible. Wednesday evening, I squeezed in the communion service over at the Presbyterian church on the way home from work. Attended the men’s prayer group early on Thursday morning. Read a devotional on Friday at lunch. Skipped breakfast on Saturday because I needed to fast a bit. What a great week! No, this is not what Wesley meant by “practicing the ordinances of God”. Wesley had in mind a life course, not a lifestyle.

Wesley is looking for our lives to look like we are totally and absolutely in love with God. Our love for God should permeate all we do, not just be something that leaks out now and then. It simply should be who we are whenever someone looks at us. Being in love with God simply needs to be our way of life.

Our faith does not need to be a complex set of actions that must be followed exactly. It does not to be so complex that it boggles the mind of an onlookers. Being in love with God simply needs to be how we live out our faith in our day to day lives. By practicing these ordinances of God, we walk the steady and consistent walk of faith that keeps us in love with God. These habits, if you will, keep us in connection with and communicating with and therefore in love with God. When we practice the habits that keep us in love with God, then our love relationship with God is on solid ground.

Three Simple Rules

"Stay in Love with God – Part 1"



At times we find ourselves separated from God.

Sometimes it is something we blindly and innocently stumble into. We can look back later and have a good

laugh. But sometimes it is of our own doing, often tied to a misstep or poorly chosen words, and our awkward moment is not so fun. Peter has the second kind of awkward moment in today's passage. After the euphoria of the triumphal entry, when the disciples were "on fire" for Jesus, came the arrest of Jesus. Peter had followed into the courtyard, where he fulfilled Jesus' prophecy that Peter would deny Christ. We remember how vehemently Peter denied that, saying he would be willing to die with Christ. Then the rooster crowed.

Please join me as we read tonight's passage from John 21:


15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."



Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."


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¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."



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¹⁷ He said to him a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."



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Jesus returns with Peter to the night that he had denied Christ three times. Three denials, three times Jesus asks, "Do you love me"? I imagine Peter was nervously waiting for this conversation. We've all been there – said or done something that we know we will have to face again at some point. Peter knew Jesus well. He knew Jesus to be a person who said what needed said. Peter knew this moment was coming, this moment of truth.

So finally, the eggshells are broken and Jesus asks the question: "Simon son of John do you love me?" Jesus chooses to use his old name instead of Peter. When Jesus renamed Peter, it was because Peter meant 'rock' and Jesus said He would build His church upon that rock. But now, in this passage, Peter is still Simon. The rock wouldn't be the one who denied Christ. Can't you see the relief on Peter's face as he can finally tell Jesus that he loves Him again? Maybe Peter can finally begin to put the guilt and shame of that night behind him.

Then Jesus asks the same question again. Same response from Peter and similar instructions from Jesus. But Peter probably feels a little more awkward, a little more connected to the night when he denied Jesus. Then Jesus asks him a third time. Do you think that Peter heard the rooster crowing in his mind? Peter is obviously hurt. But Peter is steadfast – yes Jesus I love you. And again, the same response from Jesus: feed my sheep. Jesus asks us this same question, over and over as well: do you love me?

You and I answer that question by how we live our lives. Wesley knew that.

And he knew for us to answer the question well, we had to practice the things

Stay in love with God:

- 1) Public worship.
- 2) Hearing the Word.
- 3) Holy Communion.
- 4) Personal and corporate prayer.



3 SIMPLE RULES

that kept us in love with God. Tonight, we practice the

first three and part of the fourth. We have come

together for public worship. We gather tonight to sing

our praises to God. Gathering together as the body of

Christ is how we were meant to worship. Gathering for worship reminds us that

we are brothers and sisters in Christ and also that we are children of God. In

Matthew 18:20 we are promised, "For where two or three are gathered in my

name, I am there among them". Tonight, Christ is here with us. It is in feeling

Christ's presence that we are reminded of His love for us. That He is with us and

loves us leads us to be present with Him and to return that love.

As part of worship tonight, we will also hear the Word proclaimed and we will

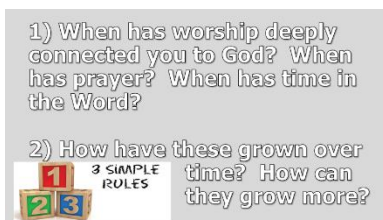
share in holy communion. It has been said that the Bible is God's love letter to

us. When we hear the word proclaimed, it reminds us of how God loves us. In

our passage tonight, we can easily relate to being Peter. Over and over again

we deny Christ as we fall into sin. In the passage we are reminded that Jesus will continue to ask us the same question as well: do you love me? Even when we do as Peter did, Jesus still loves us too. Like we are doing tonight, when we delve into the Bible, we are reminded over and over how God loves us no matter what. We will also share in times of prayer tonight. In prayer, we offer up our joys and concerns to God. In prayer, we thank God for His blessings and His presence. Prayer is another way that we maintain our connection to God and are reminded of the personal relationship that we have. God is intimately connected to us and our lives, revealing His love for us. Worship, time in the Word, prayer - all of these ordinances of God connect us to the one whom we love.

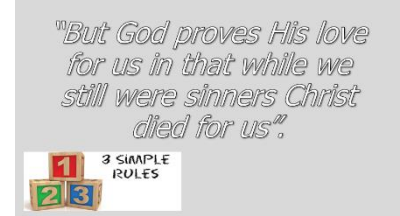
As a way to reflect and share our experiences with one another, please take a minute with those at your table to consider these two questions concerning worship, prayer, and spending time in the Word:



- 1) When has worship deeply connected you to God? When has prayer? When has time in the Word?
- 2) How have these grown over time? How can they grow more?

As we draw to a close of this portion of worship, we turn to the sacrament of communion. It is through the practice of communion that we are reminded best of Christ's love for us. It is in remembering that Jesus was willing to endure the

shame and the pain of the cross for you and me that we are reminded of just how much God in Jesus loves us. In Romans 5:8 we read, *"But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us"*. If that doesn't say 'love' I do not know what does. In communion, we come to this Jesus who loved us that much and we confess what we have done to harm the relationship. It is what we do when we love someone. We admit our failures and we seek their forgiveness. And in His limitless mercy and grace, we are forgiven as Jesus says, "I still love you". In this way, we are reminded of the depth of the love that we find in Christ. As we share in holy communion now, I encourage you to once again pledge your love to God and to dedicate your life anew to following Christ. Let us pray...



... Sharing in Holy Communion...

In closing, staying in love with God requires some efforts on our part. Yes, God will love us anyway – that is the covenant that we are blessed with. But as with any relationship, you get out what you put in. So, this week, I encourage you to practice these ordinances of God: worship God, pray to God, spend time in His holy Word. In closing, two questions to consider throughout the week:



- 1) In what ways can you worship God each day? How can your prayer life build your love of God?
- 2) When will you spend time each day in His Word? Does your commitment reflect your love of God?