

**Sermon:** *Stay in Love with God*  
**Text:** *Acts 2:41 – 47*  
**Date:** *July 12, 2009 AM*  
**Place:** *Jesup First UMC*

They met at a community dance. She had a date and he was dating her best friend, but somehow over the next few weeks they started dating. Oh, there were a few problems, like the night he put his hand on her knee and she hit him over the head with a foot-long chili dog, but those were just small bumps in the road, especially since they were falling in love. So, one day in October 1963, the preacher's kid and the farmer's son got married. And then, over the next 46 years, they had 3 kids and 10 grandkids, and they fussed and fought every now and then, but my mama and daddy really loved one another.

Relationships are interesting, aren't they? If I had a nickel for every book or article that has been written about how to have healthy and happy relationships, I'd be a very rich man. Everybody wants healthy, loving relationships and that takes a lot of work.

This morning, we're continuing a series of sermons on our Methodist heritage. You see, the founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, said there was only one requirement for those who wanted to be a Methodist and that was "*a desire to flee from the wrath to come.*" But if you wanted to stay a Methodist, he suggested there were Three General Rules that we should live by. Now, we've already looked at the first two of these, Do no harm and Do good. And today, we're going to reflect on the third General Rule: Attending upon all the ordinances of God. Wesley said: "*It is expected of all who desire to*

*continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by attending upon all the ordinances of God."*

"*The ordinances of God*"! Now, what in the world is that? And how does someone "*attend upon all the ordinances of God*"? Well, Bishop Reuben Job has written a book about the General Rules called: ***Three Simple Rules***, in which he explains the General Rules and makes them more contemporary. Bishop Job says the third General Rules can better be understood as: Stay in love with God. Do no harm; do good; and stay in love with God!

You see, at the very heart of Methodism is this understanding of relationship, of keeping our relationship with God healthy and happy. So, how do we do that? How do we stay in love with God? Well, Wesley gives us some suggestions:

**1. Stay in love with God through devotion to worship!**

After the Jews returned from exile in Babylon there were two places of Jewish worship: the Temple and the Synagogue. So, the early church continued that pattern; Luke says: "*And all the believers met together constantly ... they worshiped together at the Temple each day.*"

But even during the days of the early church, some had started to drift away. So in Hebrews 3, the writer of Hebrews tells the Christian community how easy it is to drift away from God, how everything is all well and good in the beginning, but how God's people have a habit of drifting away and then, in chapter 10,

verse 25, he writes: “Let us not neglect meeting together as some people do.”

Listen friends, I love you. I care so deeply about you. I would do anything for you and I would do anything to help this church grow and become the very best that she can be. But this church will never be what God wants it to be until we decide that the worship of God is more important than personal pleasure. You know, I can assure you that you’ll get closer to loving God by worshiping His Son than you ever will by lying out in the sun.

John Wesley said: “*It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by attending upon all the ordinances of God, such as the public worship of God.*”

## **2. Stay in love with God through devotion to scripture.**

Those early Christians were people of the word; Luke says: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” And so, as John Wesley traveled across England building Methodist Societies, he became known as “*a man of one book,*” the Bible. He read it; he studied it; he believed it; he taught it; and to the best of his ability, with the help of God, he lived it. And so, he said: “*It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by attending upon the ordinances of God, such as ... the ministry of the word, either read or expounded ... and by searching the scriptures.*”

Ronald Reagan once said: “*Within the covers of one single book, the Bible, are all the answers to all the*

*problems that face us today ... if only we would read and believe.”* But the Bible is, first and foremost, God’s revelation of Himself to humanity. And so, if we want to know God, if we want to continue in a happy and healthy relationship with God, then we must be people of one book. We must read it, study it, meditate on it, and to the best of our ability, with God’s help, live it.

### **3. Stay in love with God through devotion to Holy Communion.**

Wesley said: *“It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by attending upon the ordinances of God, such as ... the Supper of the Lord.”* Wesley believed that Methodists should Commune weekly and he wrote a sermon entitled *“On the Duty of Constant Communion.”* In fact, it was his frustration with the lack of Holy Communion for American Methodists that led him to suggest that they separate themselves from the Anglican Church. This is why we celebrate weekly communion in the 8:55 service, because we believe that Holy Communion is a means of grace, a channel through which God draws near to us and we can draw near to God.

Luke tells us the early church *“devoted themselves to the breaking of the bread”*. There is strong evidence that from the very beginning, the church celebrated Holy Communion every Sunday. Every time they got together, they took time to remember what Jesus had done for them: how He was crucified, dead and buried. For them, it wasn’t a ritual; it was a means of celebrating a relationship.

#### **4. Stay in love with God through devotion to prayer.**

Luke tells us: “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, and ... to the prayers.*”

Now, a lot of times, we approach our time of prayer as a consumer, kinda like going to Walmart. But prayer is not about retail; it’s about relationship.

One day a pastor was sitting in his study, reading the Bible when his son came in and sat at his daddy’s feet and just stared up into his face. Well, daddy expected the boy to say something and when he didn’t, he sat his bible aside and said: “*Well, what is it? What do you want?*” And the boy said: “*Oh daddy, I don’t want nuffin’; I was just lookin’ at you and lovin’ you.*”

That’s the heart of prayer; that’s why John Wesley said: “*It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation by attending upon the ordinances of God, such as ... family and private prayer.*”

Now, the problem with the ordinances of God is that we can do all the right things – we can pray, and search the scriptures, and come to worship, and celebrate Holy Communion – and still not be any closer to God than when we started ... because the ordinances of God are not a means to themselves. We don’t pray just to pray; we don’t worship just to worship. We attend upon the ordinances of God in order to sustain and even deepen our relationship with Him, to know Him and to love Him more completely.