

Attending upon all the ordinances of God. That was John Wesley's fancy way of saying Stay in Love With God. This is our last stop on our Three Simple Rules Tour. We started with Do No Harm and then Do Good.

The word ordinance sounds like an odd way to describe how we stay in love with God. When I think about an ordinance, I think about things like noise ordinances. Or how about this Kingman city ordinances. Want to have chickens? You can have one hen per 1000 ft. of lot size with a limit of 36. Do they really count all of them? What would they do if you have 37. Chicken dinner? And if you want to have a rooster well, you'll need 40,000 square ft of property or more to do that. That's about 1 acre.

To attend the ordinances of God. To Stay in Love with God describes the practices that will keep our relationship with God vital, alive, and growing.

These ordinances are public worship of God, the Lord's Supper, private and family prayer, searching the Scriptures (That you do on your own), Bible Study (That you do with others) , and fasting. These are the practices that John Wesley said were essential to a faithful life.

These practices are central to a life of faithfulness to God in Christ. The consistent practice of these disciplines will keep us in touch with the presence and power of Christ.

We learn to live in harmony with something that is so much bigger than ourselves and so much bigger than anything the world values.

Joan Chittister says this in her book, *Illuminated Life*, "All we have in life is life. Things – the cars, the houses, the educations, the jobs, the money – come and go, turn to dust between our fingers, change and disappear...the secret of life...is that it must be developed from the inside out.

Developed from the inside out. Living in the presence of and in harmony with the living God who is made known in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. This helps us live life from the inside out. This becomes our moral direction, our wisdom, our courage, and our strength to live faithfully with the author and finisher of our faith.

Living life from the inside out calls us, sustains us, and sends us into the world as witnesses who practice living the way Jesus taught.

It is these practices that will better help us hear and be responsive to God's whispers of direction. We find that we feel God's presence and power every day and in every situation. We learn to trust in the God that Jesus revealed to us. Our love for God is nurtured and sustained.

Although we individually will practice these rules differently, there are some common essentials. Practices that are essential to staying in love with God. First is a daily time of prayer. Next a time to study the Bible on your own and a time to study with others. Third is regular participation in a Christian community. This means weekly worship and regular participation in the Lord's Supper. Doing acts of goodness and mercy is another practice. And finally taking time to share with others who are seeking to following Jesus.

These practices are the pathway to courage, strength, and walking faithfully and honestly in the way of Jesus.

Jesus set the example of a relationship with God. He knew how important it was for the sake of his mission, to stay close to God. He learned the power in living the faithful and fruitful good life by staying connected, staying in touch, and staying in love with our trusted Abba.

Jesus found strength, guidance, and even joy in this relationship. Henri Nouwen, in his book "In the Name of Jesus" hints at this as he describes the dialogue between Peter and Jesus after the resurrection.

Look at Jesus. The world did not pay any attention to him. He was crucified and put away. His message of love was rejected by a world in search of power, efficiency, and control. But there he was, appearing with wounds in his glorified body to a few friends who had eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand. This rejected, unknown, wounded Jesus simply asked, “Do you love me, do you really love me” He whose only concern had been to announce the unconditional love of God had only one question to ask, “Do you love me?”

Three times Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” and three times Peter answers in the affirmative.

Each time Jesus raises the question, “Do you love me”, he is also declaring how Peter and the world will know that he was obedient to God. Holy living will not be discovered, achieved, continued, and sustained without staying in love with God.

While staying in love with God involved prayer, worship, study, and the Lord’s Supper, it also involves feeding the lambs, tending the sheep, and providing for the needs of others.

Tending to the need of others is our exchange of love with God. It is by tending to the needs of others that we offer the world something it can understand.

It is impossible to stay in love with God and not desire to see God’s goodness and grace shared with the entire world.

Again, from Henri Nouwen. “What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life. Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” We ask, “Can we sit at your right hand and your left hand in the kingdom.

Look at the exchange with Jesus. Peter denies Jesus three times. Jesus asks Peter if he loves him three times. Peter declares his love three times. With this, Peter is drawn to a new beginning and a new future.

The failures of the past? Forgotten. The new possibilities? Embraced. I'm sure we all can remember a litany of failures from our past. I sure don't have to try very hard. But the good news is this. It's never too late to start again.

The question to Peter becomes our own question. "Do you Love me?" What do we say? Now receive the response from God. "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep"

Before the whole line of questioning, Jesus does something astounding. He provides a boat swamping catch of fish and then invites them to join him for breakfast. It was only after this lavish display of grace, goodness, and love that Peter was offered his second chance. We will never be able to outdo God's goodness to us.

After the Q & A session between Jesus and Peter, Jesus says this to Peter. "Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go. He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to me, "Follow me".

While not all disciples became martyrs, I'm sure most of them went to places they never intended to go.

When we say yes to God's call of love we might also find ourselves led to places we had not intended to go. Like me standing in this pulpit!

While we have freedom in Christ, we also have a commitment to the way of Christ. Staying in love with God ensures that we keep that commitment and live a life of faithfulness, loyalty, and integrity.

I really wish I could say that I never strayed, but I believe that I am stronger today as a result. I was raised Lutheran with very strong values, I even graduated from Oral Roberts University. I'd been baptized, confirmed, filled with the Holy Spirit and went on several missions' trips.

Throughout all parts of my life, I never stopped believing in God or even wanting to serve him. But those things alone did not prevent me from straying. And straying is exactly what happened to me. It didn't happen in a dramatic way, but in small incremental steps. As life went on, I found myself presented with choices and decisions to make. The choices and decisions I made weren't always the best ones, but I rationalized them in many ways. The deeper I got into the consequences of these choices, the harder it became to live with myself. But at that time, I didn't see a way out. I kept trying. But the more I tried, the worse it seemed to get. The issue here is I was trying without God.

I did a lot of things to try to not think about how these decisions were weighing on my soul. I tried healthy things like running, but I also tried unhealthy things. None of them filled the ever-deepening void in my soul. But I remembered this. Surely goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life. God hadn't given up on me. Before I hit rock bottom, a rope was tossed to me in the form of a quote. It was a quote from a Jim Rohn newsletter that said "The Major Key to Your Better Future is You!" I had no idea at that moment what that would mean exactly, but I knew it was important.

That saying didn't prevent my rock bottom moment. When it happened, I woke up and I realized how far away I was from the person I wanted to be. I hardly knew who I was at that moment. But I knew one thing. Only God could get me back on track. I also realized that I had to want it so badly that nothing else would matter. The very next Sunday I was in church. I'm convinced that my justifying grace moments started to kick in when I started attending Santa

Cruz Valley United Methodist Church. It was hear that I started learning about the means of grace. Getting back on track had a cost. My marriage of 26 years. But when I look back on those months following that rock bottom moment, I know God was with me every step of the way and continues to be to this day. He brought the sanctifying grace moments into my life. My healing and growth began the moment I started giving it to God. It is humbling to think that this broken-down girl of just 10 years ago is now able to serve and give back to so many who helped her along the way. That is how I personally know as Peter found, that God is forgiving and pardoning.

It would be foolish for us to assume that we will escape what the first disciples weren't spared. Hardships, temptations, stumbling, falling into foolish things like arguing about who will be first among us. But the good news is we can rise above all of our denials of the way of Jesus. He is always there to offer forgiveness and a fresh start to a life of fidelity and faithfulness to God in Christ.

Stay in love with God. Simple, not easy, definitely disciplines worth practicing.