

Three Simple Rules: Practical ideas to try at home by Melissa Maher

Be loved
Do no harm
Do good
Stay in love with God

These simple rules for living form the structure of what it means to obey the Great Commandment which is expressed in two ways: love God and love neighbor. But these rules also bring about questions and call us to action. What does it mean to be loved, do no harm, do good and abide in God's love? How do I (we) follow this blueprint to wholeness? John Wesley believed you did so by practicing works of piety and works of mercy.

Works of piety are those practices that draw us into God's presence so we hear His still, small voice guiding us, His song of redemption sung over us, and His words of promise to always be with us. These works of piety are practiced in private when it is just God and us. They are also lived out publicly in corporate worship or small groups. Works of piety include reading scripture, praying, fasting, and taking time for solitude.

Works of mercy are those practices that draw us closer to one another through the presence of the Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that His followers be recognized for how they loved and served one another. Scholars have noted about John Wesley and the Methodists that "it was not so much that the Methodists were among the poor as the poor were among the Methodists." In other words, a shared life together which crosses economic, social, or ethnic boundaries and calls people to inward and outward expressions of holy love is the calling of the Christian life. To hear the cry of the needy is to hear the cry of all of God's children—the orphaned child in Zimbabwe, the single mother in Houston, the homeless man on the corner of Westheimer, the CEO in Houston, the migrant worker from Mexico, and the family in the suburbs. To hear and respond to the cry of human need has been God's work of reconciliation from the beginning of time. For God is rich in mercy and has made us alive in Christ (Eph. 2:4-5), and His justice will roll like a river (Amos 5:24). In these promises, we place our faith and hope. Mother Teresa said, "If we want the poor to see Christ in us, we have to see the image of Christ in the poor."

Three simple rules came to life in Wesley's practical, daily responses to loving God and loving neighbor. He spoke out against

- slavery which deprived humanity of freedom and dignity
- alcoholism which used grain for fermented spirits instead of food for the hungry
- health care which favored only those with money and denied care and compassion for the poor.

He encouraged his small groups to be among the poor, to visit the sick, and to witness with their eyes the deplorable conditions of those who go without. Following is a list of suggested ways to try putting the rules to work during each week of our series.

Be loved

- Accept God's love and it begins to overflow from your heart. Read one of the Gospels during the month of July. Write down how Jesus loved.
- How is God calling you to love your neighbor, coworker, family member or stranger on the street?
 - Taking a meal for someone who is sick.
 - Collecting food or Serving at a local food pantry.
 - Making basic care packages for the homeless and giving them to SEARCH, Star of Hope or a person on the street.

Do no harm

- God's love is expressed through His justice tempered by His mercy. What does this mean?
- What are ways that you can listen to those around you who are crying out for justice? What injustices (ways that equality and dignity are withheld) do you see in your neighborhood, work or city?
- Practice this week listening and hearing the cries of injustice. Pray for those who are oppressed.
- Reflect on ways that you or your family may be doing harm without being aware.
 - Consider consumption practices and places you shop. Are workers treated fairly? Are farmers or artisans fairly compensated for their work? Are you purchasing items that Wesley called luxurious and not contributing to the necessities of life?
 - Example: purchase Equal Exchange (fair trade) Coffee once a month at Chapelwood in the fountain hallway.
 - Buy presents from fair trade shops such as Ten Thousand Villages.
 - How does our energy usage affect the lives of coal miners in Appalachia, clean drinking water in Africa or India, and food supplies around the world?
 - Turn off the lights when you leave the room. Unplug unused gadgets or appliances.
 - Start hanging your clothes to dry several times a week instead of using the dryer every time.

Do good

- To do good is to reflect the love of God. Serving others means we are the hands of Christ serving Christ.
- Purchase a uniform for a student in need during the "Back to School" with MAM (Memorial Assistance Ministries) program. Look for a table in the fountain hallway July 13, 20, & 27.
- Become a mentor for a student in Spring Branch. There will be opportunities to sign up in August.
- Serve a meal at SEARCH the first Tuesday of the month with other Chapelwood members—the first Tuesday is the day Chapelwood has committed to serve each month.
- Commit to praying every day as a family or small group for those who go hungry or without shelter.

- Make basic care packages for the homeless. Give them to a person on the street, SEARCH, or Westside Homeless Partnership.
- Make a conscious effort to extend a kind word and compassion to each person you come in contact with...at work, in the grocery store, pumping gas in your car, and even at church!

Stay in love with God

- Take 15 minutes of silence at the beginning of the day to ask for God's presence to fill you, surround you and go before you. Listen to His voice. Center your thoughts on one phrase or Bible verse.
- Take 15 minutes of silence at the end of the day to examine where you saw or heard God throughout the day.
- Incorporate works of piety in your private time and in your journey with other followers of Christ.
- How and when do you hear the voice of God? In nature, exercise, moments of stillness, service? Make a covenant with your family or friends of how you will practice this intentional way of hearing God.

If you are not sure how to serve, where to serve or who God is calling you to serve? Take Chapelwood's S.H.A.P.E. class to explore your unique gifts and graces. S.H.A.P.E. is available online and in periodic classes offered by Bob Johnson and Wick Stuckey.