

“This Year I Will---Stay In Love With God”

Psalm 105:4 (NLT), Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT)

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A real old couple, I mean a very chronologically gifted couple, were sitting in the living room together. Each in their individual recliners. They had probably been married 55 or more years. The dear wife, looks at her husband and says, “How come you never say that you love me anymore?” There was a long pause, the beloved husband slowly turns to look at his wife and says, “I told you once. If anything changes, I’ll let you know.”

Oh my. For those married when is the last time you told your spouse you loved them? Don’t answer that! (but you may want to check out the Marriage Conference coming next month) Now fellow Christians, when is the last time you told Jesus that you love Him? Well, now preacher, I repented of my sins and became a follower of Jesus back in 1967---I told Jesus then I loved Him. Not good enough.

Psalm 105:4 New Living Translation (NLT) ⁴ Search for the LORD and for his strength; continually seek him.

Note the word “continually.” Not one and done. Not just once, and if anything changes, I’ll let you know. Continually. Regularly. If I say I’m going to be healthy and fit, but only go to the gym once...am I going to be healthy and fit? Huh, huh, huh???? No to make a change you must do it regularly, continually.

This year I will “Do No Harm.” This year I will “Do All the Good I Can.” This year I will “Stay In Love With God.”

There are many things in our lives that can distract us from staying in love with God. We live busy lives. There are demands and pressures from work, from family, from society and the peer pressure of what others are doing. So how can we be intentional about staying in love with God.

Colossians 2:6-7 New Living Translation (NLT) ⁶ And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. ⁷ Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

There are some here today that have not yet accepted Jesus as your Lord. We are so glad you are here. You are always welcome. If at some point you want someone to talk to Rev. Cathy, myself, and others would be glad to talk with you about a relationship with Christ Jesus.

We have called our sermon series, This Year I Will... Do No Harm, Do All the Good You Can, and Stay in Love with God. These are based on Methodist and John Wesley, the founder of Methodist’s 3 Simple Rules. They are simple, yet profound. Accepting Jesus as your Lord is also simple, yet profound. To accept Christ Jesus as your Lord, realize that you are in need of a relationship with God. God loved you so much that He sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for

your sins. Accept that Jesus died for you and all your sins and wrongdoing. Repent, tell Jesus your sorry for your sins. Ask Jesus to forgive you...and He will. Ask Him to come into your life and then be committed to a relationship with Him.

That is what being a Christian is all about. You don't have to wait until you've got it all together. You don't have to be perfect. It doesn't matter what your past has been, your current situation is not the issue...but by accepting Christ Jesus as your Lord, asking Jesus to forgive you of your sins your past is forgiven, your present is changed, and your future is solidified in a relationship with Christ Jesus.

Here then is the issue for all believers. "You must CONTINUE to follow Him." It's not an okay I've asked Jesus to forgive me and then I can do anything I want. The profoundness and yes even the complexity is that this is a life changing relationship when you are a follower of Jesus. Your spiritual roots are to grow down into Him. Your life is to be built on Him. And according to scripture when that happens your faith will grow strong and you will overflow with thankfulness.

God wants an ongoing relationship with you. So, the question becomes, "What do I need to do to stay in love with God?"

We must be involved in spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are those things that we do to help us continually connect with Jesus and deepen our relationship with Him. Rueben Job who wrote the book, "Three Simple Rules (A Wesleyan Way of Living) says this, "...we...must find our way of living and practicing those disciplines that will keep us in love with God---practices that will help keep us position in such a ways that we may hear and be responsive to God's slightest whisper of direction and receive God's promised presence and power every day and in every situation. It is these practices that we learn to hear and response to God's direction. It is in these practices that we learn to trust God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is in these practices that we learn of God's love for us. It is where our love for God is nurtured and sustained. Incorporating these practices in our way of living will keep us in love with God..." (page 55)

Notice Bishop Job says, "Keep us in love with God." There is that continual thing again.

In the Book of Revelation Jesus has words of 'revelation' to 7 churches. The first church he addresses is the Church of Ephesus. Ephesus was a city on the western coast of Asia Minor. The city was famous for its temple of Diana (also known as Artemis), and people came to Ephesus from all over the Mediterranean world to worship the goddess. Here is what Jesus says to this church:

You have shown endurance and put up with a lot for my name's sake, and you haven't gotten tired. But I have this against you: you have let go of the love you had at first. So, remember the high point from which you have fallen. Change your hearts and lives and do the things you did at first.
Revelation 2:3-5 (CEB)

Yeah, you have shown endurance. Woo-hoo!!!! Jesus says you have put up with a lot for my name's sake. Woo-hoo!!! And...through all of that you haven't gotten tired. Well, let's give a double Woo-hoo for that. Woo-hoo! Woo-hoo!!! Then Jesus says, "BUT...." Oh man, and things were going so well. Take away all those woo-hoos!

Jesus says, I have this against you. You have let go of the love you had at first.

Ah do you remember your first love. Mine was in about 4th grade. Connie. I gave her a ring...from a bubble gum machine. It didn't end well. She got mad and kicked me in the shins with her go-go boots. But I digress. Let me tell you about my first really really true love. Named Sarah. Actually Sarah is the first girl I ever kissed. When I graduated from college in Kentucky I started teaching at a Christian School in Miami. Sarah and I had just gotten engaged. Fiancée in Kentucky, me in Miami, Florida. Hold on to your seats...this was back in dark ages. No computers or internet. (SHOCK FACE) No cellular phones. (Oh my.) Although we talked some on the phone (and call after 7 p.m. because the rate was cheaper), we exchanged love letters. More than one a week.

Now times have changed. Sarah and I married. Now rather than letters we at times will randomly send the emoji with heart in the eyes or the one blowing the kiss. We continue to try to stay in love. We continue to say to each other, "I love you." It's not an "if anything changes, I'll let you know." Continually we do that because of a love relationship.

So, I wish someone would ask me, "How Do I Stay In Love With God?" XXXXX So glad you asked. Let's not just go through the motions. Let's focus on relationship not religion. Let's be fired up. Let's have zeal and passion. So....

How Do I Stay in Love With God?

Here is a list of 8 spiritual disciplines, John Wesley used the term ordinances. I encourage you to write the list of 8 down. Take a picture of the screen. We will elaborate on each one just a bit.

How do I stay in love with God?

1. Pray Daily

Notice it is not just Pray. Pray *daily*. By praying daily, it keeps you centered and focused on God. God wants to hear from you. Prayer is communicating with God. What type of relationship would you have couples if you didn't communicate with each other? Communication, or I should say lack of communication is one of the biggest areas of concern in marital discord.

You are in relationship with Jesus---communicate with Him, daily. And don't do all the talking...also listen. I am sometimes so preoccupied with telling my wants or presenting Him with what I call my "shopping list" of prayer needs, that I forget to listen.

Daily prayer is a time to give God thanks. Daily prayer is a time to confess your sin. It is a time to let God know that you need His help. Daily prayer is a time to ask for help for others.

In our daily prayer we are reminded of who is in control. Prayer changes us, and yes I believe prayer changes things through God's power. In prayer we are submitting to trust the creator of the universe.

2. Reflect on and study the Bible. Psalm 119:105 English Standard Version (ESV)
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path

This is God's love letter to you. To stay in love with God we need to read His word daily. Yep, who wouldn't want to read a love letter daily. Who wouldn't want someone each day to tell them they are loved? There are many daily devotions out there. Let us know if you need help finding a devotional. Get into scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Common English Bible (CEB) ¹⁶ Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, ¹⁷ so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.

Are you involved in a Bible Study or small group? If not, why not? It's part of staying in love with God.

3. Participate in the life of the Christian community
By being involved in church activities, ministries, missions, programs, and fellowship you are rubbing elbows with fellow followers of Jesus. Encourage one another. Help one another. Celebrate the love you have for Jesus.

4. Worship weekly
In worship we collectively are gathered to focus as one on One. We gather to focus on Jesus. We learn. We hear from God. We praise Him. We sing. We continually need to be in worship. Yes weekly. Friends I don't want you to miss out. I believe God is at work in each and every worship service each and every Sunday. I would hate for you to not be here when God has a special outpouring of His Spirit and you have to find out about later on, because you missed that Sunday. Stay in love with God through weekly worship.

5. Receive Holy Communion
By receiving this sacrament of Grace, we acknowledge who we are and how much we love Jesus and how much He loves us. His Body broken for us. His blood shed for us. In receiving Communion, we are called back to focus on Jesus and His grace. What a great way to refuel your love.

6. Fast
Now this is a spiritual discipline that perhaps some do not practice as much. I know I need to practice it more. Typically, this means taking a break and not eating a meal or a few meals to focus on prayer, God, and discernment. I always mention that there are healthy ways to fast. For example, to continue to drink water during a fast.

Let me also suggest that God may be calling you to take a fast from something besides food. During a fast you are to focus more on God. What if God called you to fast from TV for a period? What if God said to fast from social media and spend the time you would have spent on social media in prayer or study and reflection? Think about how a fast (of any kind) can deepen your love relationship with Jesus.

7. Do acts of goodness/mercy

Do all the good you can. If we love God we should also love others. Remember in the lobby and at the side door is a basket for you to drop in your list of how God called you to intentionally do good this last week.

Reuben Job says, “It is impossible to stay in love with God and not desire to see God’s goodness and grace shared with the entire world.” (page 58) Loving God. Loving All.

8. Take opportunities to share and learn from other followers of Jesus

When you love something you talk about it? Anybody hear want to talk about fishing? Golfing? NFL playoffs? Grandchildren? XXX

When you love someone, you want to talk about them. Share about your relationship. Be involved in fellowship with other believers. Be a part of a group. Spend time getting to know other followers of Jesus.

There have been times when Sarah has flown out of town. When I pick her up on her return trip at the airport, I wait for her to get off the plane. I see her. Here she comes. I wave, say hi...and then say “come on I’m in a hurry let’s get your luggage.” No. You know what I do. I just about run up to her and give her a hug and kiss. I want her to know that I missed her and that I love her.

One of my favorite things about having grandchildren is when you see them and they run into your arms. Nothing really compares to that embrace. Sometimes it’s just the embrace or the smile. And sometimes that running embrace as they say, “Pops!”

Oh, how God loves us. He wants us to stay in love with Him. By our spiritual disciplines we can run into His arms. Oh, how He loves us. He loves us so.

Who wants a vital alive relationship with Jesus? XXXXX

Who wants a relationship with Jesus that is alive? XXXXX

Who wants a relationship with Jesus that is growing? XXXXX

Stay in love with God!!!