

[PRAYER] [BLANK] I pray that all of your families and loved ones will be blessed this coming Thanksgiving, and I hope that your celebrations will be joyful and peaceful. We do have much to be thankful for, and I pray that Thanksgiving will be a day when you reflect on all the good that God gives us, and on all the good that God calls us to do, as we express our living faith.

I hope that you got some good from my first sermon on the “Three Simple Rules” of Methodism, our General Rules that have been a part of the Methodist movement since its earliest days. [BOOK] Reuben Job’s book helps us to remember that these simple rules are still so important to our faith. After all, we can use some encouragement to do the things that are simple, but hard.

I have developed a habit in recent years. [STOP SIGN] One day, I got a warning ticket for not coming to a complete stop at a stop sign. I had been becoming more spiritual, and that ticket helped me to see that I needed to make some changes in my attitudes and actions. So, I decided to make it a habit to come to a full and complete stop every time that I came to one. A simple rule, but at first it was hard to follow it all the time! I was so used to making exceptions for myself. Pretty quickly I began to see that I had made a habit of making exceptions for myself in many areas of my life. It turns out that this simple traffic rule was reminding me about my need for spiritual discipline. So now, when I am tempted to almost-kinda-sorta stop at a stop sign, that temptation gently reminds me who God wants me to be. [BLANK]

It’s a simple habit, but it’s not always easy to do it every single time. Our three simple rules of Methodism remind us that it’s in repeating the simple things of our faith, again and again, consciously, persistently, insistently, that we find living, life-saving faith. Faith isn’t just a belief. It’s a habit. Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God. These are the habits that we need, day in and day out, to live in Jesus, so that when we need God the most, we’ll be in God already. [SECOND RULE]

Do good. Wow, what could we want to do more than that! This church, like many United Methodist churches, is filled with people who love to do good. [BAZAAR] When I saw the amazing joy that people brought to our church bazaar this month, or making apple pies or chili earlier this fall, I saw people who know how to do good, again and again! When I see the warmth that everyone expresses to people during our passing of the peace, I see people who know how to do good. [MISSION] When I look at the faces from this church that lit up with joy on their mission trips to Nicaragua, or helping to renovate our Unity House home for refugee families, I see people who love to do good.

We “get” doing good. That’s simple enough. But where are limits of doing good as a Christian? When is doing good...good enough? The Methodist answer to this question is simple, but not easy. [QUOTE] While it’s not clear that John Wesley said all of these exact words at one single time, he certainly made it clear many times that he believed every word of them: “Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.” [BLANK]

Wow. How's that for boundaries? That's not just a now-and-again kind of good. That's not just a "when I feel up to it" kind of good. That's an all-in, all the time, everywhere, for everyone kind of good. Do good. Full stop. Period. Because that's what God does. If we really believe in our salvation from sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ, if we really believe that our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our savior invites us to become new creations in Christ, true children of God, this is what our Christian faith really means! We are really, REALLY to be like Jesus!

But before we start heading for the exits in panic, thinking that we'll be exhausted for the rest of our lives, let's remember what it is to be like Jesus. Jesus knew how to take care of himself. He fasted in a desert for forty days after his baptism, not to go on a diet, or to prove something to himself, but to take care of himself. He needed to purify his soul and his body with God's love, so that when Satan came to tempt him, with everything that evil and worldly power could offer, doing the simple good that God wants in the world would be a no-brainer. He prayed alone quietly when he needed to. He went to weddings, to rejoice with people! He surrounded himself with disciples, and taught them how to be good together, so that the world would be filled with people being good like Jesus. Jesus knew that the habit of doing good was his best self-care!

In other words, Jesus did good, and taught others to do good, because it was his passion. It was who he was. More than really stopping at stop signs, being good was not even a second nature for Jesus, but a first nature; his way of life. Doing good isn't so much about the doing: it's really about the being. When we choose to be a Methodist Christian, we choose to commit ourselves not just to activities, or causes, or fellowships, but to a way of life that is about becoming who we're meant to be, together, a people who are really like Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, for the sake of God's world.

[EPHESIANS] The New Testament letter to the Ephesians explains this "becoming" part of our faith walk very well. Ephesians 2 says, "For by grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not our own doing; not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are God's good workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

Through our faith, God's grace, God's undeserved gift of everlasting love, saves us from doing harm through sin; we can never save ourselves from it. We can't "do" our way to salvation. But salvation through faith in God's grace is just the beginning of becoming who we are meant to be. God's good workmanship makes us a new creation in Christ, a new kind of person, a person who was meant to rejoice in doing good works as our way of life, forever.

Notice those words "our" and "we." To do good as a new creation in Christ is to be someone whose way of life will never be a solo shot. To do good is to be one of God's very good creations who God has invited into God's family since the beginning of time. If doing the good that God wants us to do sounds scary at times, remember this: it's the only thing that makes us really alive, and it's the only thing that will ever last into eternity. Everything else goes out the window. To do good is to be who you were meant to be, now,

