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Three Simple Rules: Do Good

Last week we started a new sermon series on the Three Simple Rules – the very basic guidelines that John Wesley gave to the United Societies, the small group ministries he formed back when the Methodist movement was just getting off the ground. He said that as long as we strive to do three things, we will be well on our way to living faithful lives. First, Do no harm, Second, Do Good, and third, Stay in love with God. Last week we tackled “Do no harm”, focusing on avoiding hurtful behaviors, words and actions toward others, including the challenge of not repaying harm for harm when we have been hurt by others. This morning, we’ll jump in to the second of John Wesley’s simple rules – Do good.

To me, this is the one that sounds the easiest, the one we typically focus on as we strive to live out our faith – at least in our branch of Christianity. We are constantly talking about loving our neighbor as ourselves, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, extending care to those in need, and the list goes on. We could look at ministry after ministry in our church for examples of how we live this rule out – and in fact, I’ll invite you now to take out a pen from the pew rack in front of you and jot down three examples you can think of right now... they can be from our church ministry, or something you do on your own... three different ways that we “do good” in our lives and through our church.

I’m going to ask you to come back to that list in a little bit, but for now, just set it aside and let’s dig a little deeper into this second deceptively simple rule. While this sounds like such a basic principle... do good... it immediately presents problems to us... we wonder, well how far should I go? There are endless ways for me to do good! To whom should I do good? What is the ultimate purpose of these good acts? How do I know that what I think is good really is good, and not unintentionally causing harm?!

Based on Jesus’ teachings and way of life, we are called to do good to all – friend and outcast, whether it’s convenient or not, whether we want to or not. And John Wesley picked up this spirit of ultimate servanthood and continued this teaching, within the 3 simple rules and beyond. While John Wesley never wrote or said the following words in this form, they are consistent with what he taught his Methodists, and have come to be known as “John Wesley’s Rules for Christian Living.”

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.

I have to admit that while I love the sentiment of this ALL, ALL, ALL, ALL, ALL quote, because it points to the impact our faith should have on the way we live – not just for one hour on Sunday mornings, and not just in our church sphere – it at the same time overwhelms me... like maybe it's a bit too much to ask. If I'm really doing all the good at all times in all ways to all people, then at some point my cup is going to be empty... at some point I'm going to run dry of resources, financial or emotional, and crumble in on myself.

To this point, I bring us back to the first line, and to the very premise of this simple rule. Do all the good we can. If we are trying to do so much for others that there is nothing left for our family, friends, or even ourselves, then we have crossed over into doing harm... and that's too far. Part of the good we need to do is to ourselves. Rest and refreshment and taking care of ourselves is part of God's good for our lives so we need to take time for some self-care – not out of selfishness, but because we are also God's children, created in God's image and deserving of God's love and attention. And the truth is that if we don't truly take care of ourselves, we can't do good to or for others.

Don't be overwhelmed by the ALLs of those rules for Christian living, but simply allow them to open you to a mindset of service and good works at any time and in any place. As Mother Theresa once said, "We can do no great things; only small things with great love." I invite you to look again at the list you created of the three ways we do good through this church or in your own life. I invite you to think about the last time you participated in that ministry or activity? If it's the Backpack Crew, when was the last time you brought in food for the basket, or packed a backpack, or asked how you could help? If it's a caregiving ministry, when was the last time you called, wrote a card, or visited someone who is sick or homebound? And what was it that nudged you into this act of service? Were you asked or did you seek out the opportunity to do good?

If you have been active in doing good recently, GREAT! and keep up the good work. If it's been a while for you, I invite you to reflect on how God is calling you to do good this week. This simple rule calls us to live God's love in action, and we need to be proactive... not just waiting until someone asks you to step up to doing good, but be on the lookout for ways you can be doing good at all times, in all places. And it doesn't need to be in or through the church! There are lots of ways of doing good in our everyday lives!

Many of us have heard of, and possibly even participated in the Random Acts of Kindness movement that has swept through our nation in previous years. Maybe you've

gone to a Starbucks and been surprised that the person before you paid for YOUR coffee, and perhaps you joined in the fun and bought the drink for the person behind you. Often, this creates a chain of people buying drinks for others. It's a wonderful and beautiful thing that brings a smile to people's face. We often see a spike in these kinds of random acts of kindness around Christmas time, sometimes at the toy store or the supermarket. My only question about these random acts of kindness is what is the depth and impact that they have for people. While bringing a smile to someone's face is good, we are called to take it one step further to leave an impact that lasts longer than a few minutes.

Have you ever seen the movie Pay it Forward? It's a great film where a young boy is asked to create a project that will change the world, one that will make the world a better place. Some of his friends get busy trying to think of some new invention that will revolutionize the way we do X, Y, or Z, but not Trevor... he comes up with an idea that if you do an act of kindness so life changing that it rearranges a person's life, that it makes their life so much better, that it would then create a ripple effect as they will go and do transformational acts of kindness for others.

These are the kind of proactive, bold and radical acts of good that we are called to do. Maybe it's a new commitment to volunteer somewhere. Maybe it's getting to know your neighbors and doing good in your community. Maybe there's someone at work that God is calling you to love. Whatever it is, we are called to do good as often and mightily as possible, and whether you see it or realize it, through these good works, we are changing the world one heart and life at a time.

I invite us all to go out this week looking for ways to do good, at all times and to all people. Let's go to spread the love and work of God in our lives, to let God's love spread, transforming our lives and the world into LOVE in action! May it be so. Amen.