

Saturday

In the last chapter of John, Jesus asked Simon Peter a question three times for emphasis, underlining the importance of the question.

Read John 21:15-19

What is your answer to the question, "Do you love me?"
What did Jesus mean by "feed my sheep"?

What is the most important insight God has shown you this week?

What new thing(s) can you do to express your faith?

A Congregational Prayer of Confession

(#890, in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 1989)

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Three Simple Rules Attend to the Ordinances of God

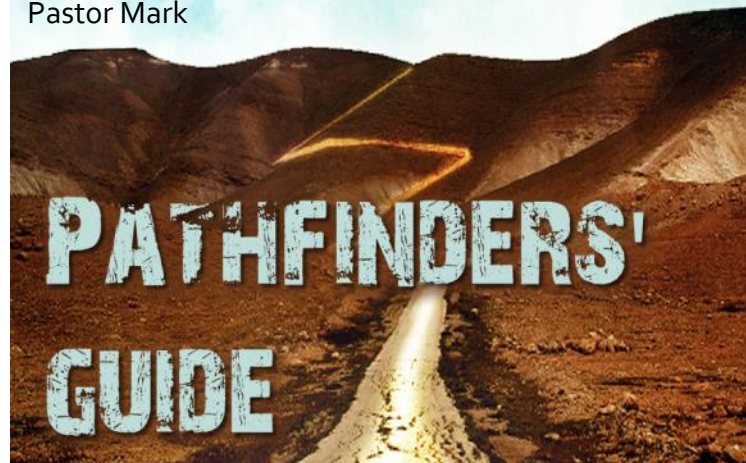
January 22-28, 2012

When we were growing up, my youngest sister loved Dr. Pepper. It wasn't her fault, really, she had been spoiled to it by our maternal grandmother. It was her delight to pour a child-sized cup of the precious beverage for us during breaks from the summer sun. It was delicious and sweet and went down easy. It did refresh us often at 10, 2, and 4 just as the clock on the bottle said its prescription should be taken.

One afternoon around 4, we all dashed into the house, famished from the most supreme hide-n-go seek game we would play with our cousins, until dark, of course. Gran poured the precious refreshment, we downed our share and then sat in the coolness of her evaporative air-conditioner. Suddenly, my sister bounded into the kitchen and stated to my grandmother that she believed she was nervous. "Honey, what makes you think you're nervous?" she asked. "Because, I feel like I am in a hurry, all over my body." The sugar and caffeine had combined in the empty stomach of a six-year-old, to a brand new effect.

I reflect on that moment a lot. How often do we feel like we are in a hurry, all over our body? How often does the busy-ness of life create for us a frenzied pace that, when we have time to collect ourselves, seems crazy? Now, I believe busy-ness is the best opportunity we have to neglect the truly important aspects of the Christian life. How will we ever attend to the practices that lead us God-ward when we have failed to make time for it? Take this very guide, this week, and do just that. Who wants to go through life in a hurry, all over their body?

Pastor Mark



Sunday

From John Wesley's General Rules (1743) — "It is expected of all who

continue therein that they should continue to evidence their idea of salvation, ... "Thirdly, By attending upon all the ordinances of God." Job reworded this rule: "Stay in love with God."

What keeps you in touch with God?

Monday

Commentary by Bishop Job — Ordinance is a strange word to our ears.

But to John Wesley, it was a word that described the practices that kept the relationship between God and humans vital, alive, and growing. He names public worship of God, the Lord's Supper, private and family prayer, searching the Scriptures, Bible study, and fasting as essential to a faithful life. While we may have different names for our essential disciplines, these practices can become a life-giving source of strength and guidance for us.

What spiritual disciplines do you maintain?

Tuesday

Commentary by Bishop Job — The [three] rules are simple, but the way

is not easy. Only those with great courage will attempt it, and only those with great faith will be able to walk this exciting and demanding way.

Say in your own words why these rules are simple but yet hard.

Wednesday

Jesus invited everyone, but made it clear that the kingdom of God (or heaven) is not for everybody. What a paradox!

Read Matthew 13:1-31

What about the billions of people who were not on the path, or those who rejected it, or never heard about it?

Thursday

Ancient (Jewish) psalmists had a very different perspective than 21st-century

Americans. Of course, they may not have been typical of their place and time either.

Read Psalm 105:1-6

What can people who live in a world of many distractions and responsibilities do to focus on God today?

Friday

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the kingdom of God (the entrance through a narrow gate) as something only for the few.

Read Matthew 7:13-14

Why is leading the Christian life so difficult? Why is the road to life "hard" ?
