

FIVE MARKS OF A METHODIST · COMPANION RESOURCE

Loving God in the Ordinary

A Seven-Day Devotional Guide

*A companion resource to Mark 1 of **Five Marks of a Methodist** by Steve Harper*

Steve Harper writes that a Methodist loves God. Not admires God, not believes in God in an abstract sense, but loves God — with the whole heart, the whole mind, the whole life. Wesley understood this love not as a feeling that arrives and departs on its own terms, but as a relationship that is tended, practiced, and deepened in the ordinary moments of an ordinary day.

This guide is for seven days. Each day is brief — ten minutes or less. The readings are short, the questions are honest, and the practice is simple. The goal is not to produce a spiritual experience. The goal is to pay attention to the love of God that is already present in the life you are already living.

01

DAY ONE

What Love of God Actually Feels Like

—SCRIPTURE

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

MARK 12:30 (CEB)

—REFLECTION

Jesus quotes this as the first and greatest commandment. Notice that it is a commandment. Not a suggestion, not a description of what the spiritually gifted feel, but a command given to everyone. Wesley took this seriously. If love of God is commanded, then it is something we can do — or fail to do. It is not simply something that happens to us.

That is either very liberating or very uncomfortable, depending on where you are today.

Think about the relationships in your life where love is most alive. What does that love look like in practice? It probably involves attention — you notice the other person. It involves preference — you choose to spend time with them. It involves delight — you are glad they exist.

God invites the same orientation. Not performance. Not guilt. Attention, preference, delight.

—QUESTION FOR TODAY

When did you last feel genuine delight in God — not duty, not relief, but actual delight? What was happening?

—PRACTICE

Sometime today, stop what you are doing for two minutes. Not to pray formally. Just to notice. Notice what is around you, who is around you, what your life actually contains. Then say, simply: Thank you. That is the beginning of love.

02

DAY TWO

The Ordinary Is Where God Lives

—SCRIPTURE

Where could I go to get away from your spirit? Where could I go to escape your presence? If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I went down to the grave, you would be there too.

PSALM 139:7-8 (CEB)

—REFLECTION

One of the persistent temptations in the life of faith is to locate God primarily in the extraordinary — in the dramatic worship moment, the powerful sermon, the retreat experience, the crisis that finally brought you to your knees. Those moments are real and they matter. But if God is only present in the extraordinary, then God is mostly absent. Most of life is ordinary.

Wesley believed God was present in the mundane. His journals are remarkable for how thoroughly they record the ordinary — meetings, meals, travels, conversations, illnesses, small kindnesses, small failures. He was not waiting for extraordinary moments. He was paying attention to the ordinary ones.

The love of God is practiced in the ordinary because that is where we actually live. The commute. The meeting that ran long. The conversation that didn't go the way you hoped. The meal you made for someone who needed it. The middle-of-the-night worry that you brought, finally, to God.

—QUESTION FOR TODAY

Where did you encounter God yesterday — not in the moments you planned for God, but in the ones you didn't?

—PRACTICE

Keep a small log today — on paper or on your phone. Every time something happens that you notice — something that makes you pause, something small that moves you, something that frustrates you and makes you wonder — write two words that name it. At the end of the day, read the list. God was in more of it than you thought.

03

DAY THREE

When Love of God Feels Distant

—SCRIPTURE

My God! My God, why have you left me all alone? Why are you so far from saving me — so far from my anguished groans?

PSALM 22:1 (CEB)

—REFLECTION

Wesley had a famous crisis of faith aboard a ship in a storm, watching Moravian passengers sing calmly while he was terrified — and realizing he did not have what they had. He went on to have the Aldersgate experience, which he described as his heart being “strangely warmed.” But the warmth didn’t stay constant. His journals record seasons of dryness, doubt, and what he simply called “heaviness.”

He did not conclude that God had left. He concluded that God was present even in the heaviness — and that the practice of faith continued regardless of what he felt.

This is important for anyone who follows Jesus seriously, because the expectation of constant felt intimacy with God is a setup for either performance or despair. The psalms are honest about the distance. The tradition is honest about the dark night. You are allowed to be honest too.

Love of God, on the days when it feels most distant, often looks like showing up anyway. Praying when prayer feels like talking to a wall. Reading scripture when it seems flat. Serving when you are depleted. Not because the feeling will return if you perform correctly, but because love is not only a feeling.

—QUESTION FOR TODAY

Where in your life right now does love of God feel distant or difficult? What has that been like?

—PRACTICE

Pray Psalm 22:1 out loud today. Just those words. You are not being unfaithful by praying them. You are joining every honest person of faith who has prayed them before you — including Jesus, who prayed them from the cross.

04

DAY FOUR

Love of God and the Body

—SCRIPTURE

Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? Don't you know that you have the Holy Spirit from God, and you don't belong to yourselves?

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19 (CEB)

—REFLECTION

Wesley was unusually attentive to the body as a site of spiritual life. He rode on horseback for most of his adult life — tens of thousands of miles — and wrote extensively about health, sleep, diet, and physical discipline. This was not vanity or asceticism for its own sake. It was theological. The body is where we live. Neglecting it is not spiritual; it is a failure of stewardship.

Love of God is practiced in a body. You bring your tiredness to prayer. You bring your hunger, your restlessness, your illness, your capacity for pleasure and rest. Ignoring the body in the spiritual life doesn't make you more spiritual — it just makes you less honest about what you are actually carrying.

People who care deeply about their faith and the people around them are often among the worst at this. The body gets used as a tool and ignored as a person. Sleep is treated as a weakness. Rest is a luxury. The result, eventually, is a depleted person trying to love God and neighbor on empty.

Wesley's practice of bodily discipline was an act of love — honoring the life God had given him so that he could continue to use it.

—QUESTION FOR TODAY

How is your body doing right now, honestly? What is it carrying that you haven't paid attention to?

—PRACTICE

Before you go to sleep tonight, lie still for five minutes. No phone. No review of the day's tasks. Just breathe. If prayer comes, let it come. If it doesn't, the breathing is enough. This is your body, resting in the presence of the God who made it.

05

DAY FIVE

Loving God Through Loving People

—SCRIPTURE

Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters are liars, because those who don’t love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can’t love God, whom they have never seen.

1 JOHN 4:20 (CEB)

—REFLECTION

This is one of the most direct verses in the New Testament, and one of the most uncomfortable. The love of God and the love of neighbor are not two separate tracks. They are one movement. You cannot split them without losing both.

Wesley understood this completely. His theology of sanctification — of growing in love — was not individualistic. You could not become more loving toward God while becoming less attentive to the person in front of you. The two grew together or they did not grow at all.

This has a way of finding each of us where we actually live. You can be genuinely busy loving people — serving, giving, showing up — while your personal love for God is running on fumes. And you can be privately devout — maintaining the practices, reading scripture, praying faithfully — while keeping actual people at a careful distance. Wesley would say both are failures. Both are incomplete.

Love of God shows up in what you do with the person who is hardest for you to love right now. Not people in general. That specific person.

—QUESTION FOR TODAY

Who is the person right now that it is hardest for you to love? What would it look like to love them — not to fix them, not to manage them, but actually to love them?

—PRACTICE

Pray for that person today. Not about them, not concerning the problem they represent. For them — for their life, their wellbeing, their relationship with God. Two minutes. It will change something, though probably not immediately, and probably not them first.

06

DAY SIX

The Practices That Sustain Love

—SCRIPTURE

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me.

JOHN 15:4 (CEB)

—REFLECTION

Wesley did not believe that love of God could be sustained by willpower alone. He built structures around it — the class meeting, the band meeting, the general rules, the means of grace. Not because structures produce love automatically, but because love requires conditions to grow in. A vine requires soil, water, light, and pruning. It does not grow by trying harder.

The means of grace — prayer, scripture, the Lord's Supper, fasting, Christian conferencing — were Wesley's answer to the question: what are the conditions in which love of God can be sustained over a lifetime? Not over a retreat weekend or a season of renewal, but over a lifetime.

This is the question worth sitting with today. Not whether you love God right now, in this season, in this feeling. But whether you have built the conditions in which that love can survive the seasons when it feels absent. The dry seasons. The seasons of grief or exhaustion or doubt. The seasons when faith feels like a habit and God feels like a concept.

What does your life actually contain that sustains love of God over time?

—QUESTION FOR TODAY

Of the practices that have most sustained your relationship with God over the years, which ones are currently most present in your life — and which ones have quietly disappeared?

—PRACTICE

Name one practice you have lost that you want to recover — not because you should, but because you genuinely miss it. Write it down. Tell one person. Small acts of intention, made visible, have a way of taking root.

07

DAY SEVEN

Love as a Way of Being, Not an Arrival

—SCRIPTURE

Now faith, hope, and love remain — these three things — and the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 (CEB)

—REFLECTION

Wesley's vision of sanctification — what he called “entire sanctification” or “perfect love” — was not a destination you arrive at and then stop moving. It was an orientation. A direction. A way of being in the world that is continuously deepened, continuously challenged, continuously renewed.

This matters because the alternative — treating love of God as something you either have or don't have, as a spiritual achievement to be attained and then maintained — tends toward either pride or despair. You either think you've arrived and stop growing, or you conclude you never will and stop trying.

Wesley's more useful frame is this: love of God is the direction you are always moving in. Some days you move quickly. Some days you barely move. Some days you move backwards. But the direction is set, and the orientation is what matters.

After seven days of paying attention to love of God in the ordinary — in the body, in the people around you, in the practices you keep or have let go — you have not arrived anywhere. You have simply been paying attention. That is enough. That is, in fact, everything.

The ordinary days ahead of you are the same ordinary days you have always had. They are also, in exactly the same way, full of God.

—QUESTION FOR TODAY

At the end of these seven days, what do you know about your love of God that you didn't let yourself know before?

—PRACTICE

Write a one-paragraph letter to yourself — not to God, not to your congregation or community, to yourself — about what loving God looks like in your ordinary life right now. Be honest. Be kind. Seal it, or save it somewhere private, and read it in six months.

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