

Three Simple Rules: Do Good

2/3 of "Three Simple Rules"

1 Peter 2: 11-12

02-15-2009 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

Introduction

Cameron Tidwell is a senior at Shiloh Hills Christian School in Kennesaw, Georgia. Cameron has played basketball since he was old enough to bounce a ball. When he entered ninth grade, he set a goal of scoring 1,000 points in his high school career.

During the first game of his senior year last fall, Cameron tore the ligaments in his left knee. The doctor said that the injury would require surgery, but Cameron could delay the operation if the pain did not become too severe. The teenager chose to continue the season, playing through the pain.

In mid-January, Shiloh Hills played Dominion Christian Academy from Marietta. Cameron only needed 5 more points to reach his goal of 1,000. After scoring a layup, he came down awkwardly on his knee and collapsed to the floor. It was obvious to everyone that he could not return. His high school career total remained at 997 points.

Dominion's coach, Mike Gold, called timeout and approached the other bench to speak with Shiloh's coach. A few minutes later Cameron hobbled out to the court, supported by his older brother. The ref blew the whistle for the game to resume, and Dominion's guard inbounded the ball. He deliberately passed it to Cameron who scored an easy basket. Dominion took the ball out and again passed it to Cameron who scored his 1,001st point. The stands went wild.

I saw the story on the news this past week, and I must confess that I teared up a bit. What a great human interest story. Then I began to think about WHY it was news. Shouldn't such actions by people like Mike Gold be the rule rather than the exception?

I. Do No Harm

Today's sermon is the second in a three part series entitled "**Three Simple Rules.**" Last week we heard the story of how a group of believers approached John Wesley in London. They asked the founder of the Methodist movement to assist them in their Christian walk. The group began to meet weekly, and this became the genesis of the Methodist "class system." Groups of twelve Christians would meet each week for mutual support and accountability.

Wesley developed three simple guidelines that he called "**the General Rules:**"

Do no harm.

Do good.

Stay in love with God.

Last week we explored what it means to "**Do no harm.**" This is the Christian ethic stated in the negative. We are told what NOT to do. God's law draws clear boundaries so that we don't stray into dangerous territory. If we ignore God's *No Trespassing* signs and go "out of bounds," then someone will get hurt.

At the conclusion of the first sermon, I encouraged you to make the first rule your motto for the week. How did your experiment in doing no harm go? It's much tougher than it first appears. "Do no harm" to self and others is quite challenging.

However, this is only the starting point of faithful discipleship. Ultimately, the first rule of avoiding harm is not enough.

Fans of the TV series *Seinfeld* will recall the sitcom's final episode. In my humble opinion, other than the *M*A*S*H* finale, it might be THE most disappointing conclusion of a television series. But I digress!

In the final show, Jerry, George, Kramer, and Elaine become stranded in a small town after their airplane malfunctions. While standing downtown, they witness a carjacking occur in front of them. Rather than helping, they watch from a distance, making snide comments about the victim. Kramer even videotapes the incident.

A police officer arrives and arrests the foursome for DOING NOTHING TO HELP. The fictional scene was based on factual precedent. Many communities really do have a *Good Samaritan Law* that REQUIRES onlookers to help someone in danger if it is reasonable to do so. Elaine protests, "*The Good Samaritan Law? Are they crazy?*" George says, "*Why would WE want to help somebody? That's what nuns and Red Cross workers are for!*"

Doing nothing is tempting. Dominion coach, Mike Gold, could have done nothing at the Shiloh Hills' game, and no one would have thought any less of him. Cameron Tidwell was not his player. I doubt anyone in the stands expected him to do anything at all. However, the basketball coach understood that doing no harm is only the starting point of Christian living. He chose to do more to help Cameron Tidwell.

II. Do Good

The second of the "Three Simple Rules" is "**Do good.**" After we do no harm, we are called to actively seek the best for ourselves and others. "Do no harm" draws the boundaries within which we are called to live. Then we are freed up to do good.

Imagine a blank canvass in a frame. Avoiding harm is the framework of the picture. We then get to paint the canvas with acts of goodness and love.

In Christian discipleship, there is a relationship between BEING good and DOING good. Our goal is to become like Jesus Christ. In fact, "Christian" literally means "Christ-like." Romans 8:29 says that God's ultimate goal is for us "*to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.*" BEING good comes from a lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ. Spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, and service enable us to grow in grace.

BEING good leads us to DOING good. We attempt to act out our faith in daily life. Who we are should be reflected in how we live. If our coworkers, neighbors, or friends visited church next week, then they shouldn't be surprised to see us here!

Paul said that works without faith is dead. James said that faith without works is dead! They are two sides of the same coin. BEING leads to DOING; and DOING leads to BEING. They become a self-reinforcing cycle of faith and works, and work and faith, and faith and works, and

III. How Good?

So “Do no harm” and “Do good.” The first two rules sound simple enough. However, this leads to an important follow-up question: “**HOW good?**”

We are all willing to do SOME good and do our part. Put an extra \$20 in the offering plate for a special cause. Drop loose change into the Salvation Army bucket during the holidays. Donate a bag of canned goods for the *Scary to be Hungry* food drive. Bring something to church for the monthly “Basket Ministry.” Buy some Girl Scout cookies. Give at the office to *United Way*.

But how much is ENOUGH? I mean, this doing good thing could quickly get out of hand! I’m willing to do my part, but I want to know exactly what my part might be.

When teachers assign projects to students, they often supply a “rubric.” The instruction sheet spells out the expectations along with the grading scale. I’m a big fan of rubrics because I want to know the expectations up-front.

Most of us would like a rubric from God defining just how Christian we have to be. Forget about making a 100—we just want to know where the Pass/Fail line is located! And to give us credit, I think once we knew the minimum expectations, then we would be willing to do more. Just not TOO much more.

I’ve got good news for you. Jesus DID define how much we had to do. When asked he said, “*Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as you love yourself.*” That’s all! Love of God, neighbor, and self is what paints the picture inside the law’s frame.

Here is the challenge: love does not speak a language of limits. The very act of defining how much love is enough love undermines Christian love. There is no such thing as “enough.” A rubric does not exist. Our part is God’s part, and God’s part is love without end, Amen. So doing good means doing our absolute best with no question of “How much?” and “When’s enough?”

John Wesley once said:

*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.*

ALL, y’all—that’s a lot of good. So we need to get our “cans” to work!

IV. Doing Good

A. Self

“Doing good” begins with doing good for ourselves. Loving others as we love ourselves includes loving ourselves. When we see ourselves as valued, children of God, then we are called to a high standard of goodness and holiness.

Mind

Philippians 4:8: *“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

Body

We are called to care for our bodies as the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells. We honor God with our bodies without idolatrizing physical health. This speaks to nutrition, exercise, rest, medical care, and much more. In the past, health insurance has been more illness insurance; but there has been a real shift in the healthcare industry. The emphasis is now on health. For example, my insurance company now provides free pedometers and financial incentives for walking, wellness exams, and more.

Soul

What feed our soul? Next week we will explore the third rule to “Stay in love with God.” The Lord has provided us with spiritual disciplines that nurture and satisfy our souls.

B. Others

“Doing good” continues in our relationships with others. How do we love our neighbor as we love ourselves? How do we love our neighbor as God has loved us?

Words

Last week we talked about words that hurt and words that heal. The New Testament letter of James talks at length about the destructive and constructive power of the tongue. As children, we grew up with the ditty, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never harm me.” That’s a lie. Words can do great harm.

I grew up hearing the saying, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” The statement is both simplistic and profound at the same time. Yes, there are times that we have to speak the truth in love, and this might be harmful. Many times, however, we would be better off saying nothing.

Actions

Love is both words and deeds. Love is not truly love until it is sacrificial love—actions that cost us something. We are called to act for the good of others without thought of personal cost. Jesus said there is no greater love than a person lay down their life for another. We might think of this occurring in heroic displays of sacrifice, but it often takes place in random acts of kindness.

I once worked on a committee with a man whom I will call **Jim**—because that was his name! I must confess that Jim was not my most favorite person in the world. He was a workaholic that I found to be stiff, stuffy, and legalistic. He also had no sense of humor—which I define as not finding ME funny!

Later someone told me a story about Jim that changed my entire opinion of the man. On Sunday nights, he and his wife along with a few other folk would go to Waffle House after church for a late supper. He always tipped the waitress with a \$20 bill. His

tightfisted wife would regularly take him to task for his generosity. He always replied, "I'm sure that she needs the money more than we do." But he finally agreed to stop.

So every Sunday he would leave some change on the table. As his wife walked out ahead of him, he would wave a \$20 behind his back to one of the other people who went with them. The person would take the \$20 and place it on the counter for the waitress' tip.

Doing good for others often occurs in the places of our vocation. Simply doing our job well can be a great source of treating others with love.

On January 15, 2009, US Airways flight 1549 took off from LaGuardia Airport in New York City. A few minutes into the flight a flock of birds disabled the plane's engines. Captain Chesley Sullenberger managed to safely set the Airbus 320 down in the Hudson River. All 155 passengers survived. In an interview, Katie Couric asked the pilot, "Did you, at any point, pray?" Sullenberger replied, "I would imagine somebody in the back was taking care of that for me while I was flying the airplane!"

One of the more remarkable parts of the story was the pilot's reaction to the national acclaim. He said time and again that he was simply doing his job.

Do your job well, and do good as business people, nurses, doctors, EMTs, teachers, sales clerks, secretaries, students, mentors, and parents.

"Doing good" not only helps others but also gives us an opportunity to witness for our faith. 1 Peter 2: 12: "*Live such good lives among the pagans that . . . they many see your good deeds and glorify God . . .*"

V. Bad for Good

We are called to do good regardless of how others treat us in turn. A cynical proverb says, "*No good deed goes unpunished!*" In a fair world, we would do good and receive good in turn. But as I tell my children, the fair only comes to town in September! It's NOT a fair world. Sometimes people return evil for good.

We choose between a reactive and a proactive life. We can simply react to how others treat us. We love the lovable and despise the despicable. Others' actions control who we are. OR we can allow the Holy Spirit to give us the power to be proactive. To act without thought of the reaction. To love without consideration of love returned

Ultimately, doing good is not based upon who the other person is but who we are. By God's grace and power, I can control who I am and how I act. In Christ, we can even bless those who curse us and pray for those who persecute us.

Conclusion

Gregg and Brittany Peters live in Gainesville, Georgia. They have three young children. Last April their two year old son, Noah, was diagnosed with multiple disorders. During the summer, doctors diagnosed their seven year old daughter, Ayla, with juvenile diabetes. Special treatment for the two children costs about \$2,000 per month.

The couple began keeping a list of things they could sell. They finally decided to sell everything they owned. They listed about \$40,000 worth of household items on E-Bay for sell to the highest bidder.

Last weekend Donnia and Keith Blair from Texas won with the winning bid of \$20,000. However, there's a twist. The Blairs told the Peters to keep their stuff—and the \$20,000. When the young family protested, Donnia Blair said: “They’ve worked really hard to get those things, and we’re in a position to help them. (They) can just act like they’re my storage facility!”

There's a final twist. The Peters have said that they want to pass along the gift to others. They plan on donating their 2000 Chevrolet Tahoe to someone in worse need than themselves.

Both families understand that we are blessed to be a blessing to others. We act out our faith in the day to day living of life. Being and doing, doing and being. Faith and works, works and faith.

Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.