



THE HEART OF A METHODIST

STUDY GUIDE

Mark #1: Loves God

Book: *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper

SCRIPTURE

36 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" 37 He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." *Matthew 22:36-40 (NRSV)*

Jesus and Peter

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me." *John 21:15-19 (NRSV)*

18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. *1John 4:18-19 (NRSV)*

STUDY & REFLECT/DISCUSS:

The Five Marks of a Methodist, Mark #1: Loves God

Christians don't just believe that God exists. Christians love God. For a Christian, life revolves around the Great Commandment, to love God and love others.

- 1. What or who is something that you love or have loved? How did you orient your life around that love?** (Example: A high school girl loves to dance. Every weekday night and all day Saturday, she is in the studio, in a dance class. She reads dance books and magazines. She snacks on rice cakes and fat-free yogurt and soaks her feet in Epsom salts every night after class.)
2. Steve Harper reminds us, "Even if we find ourselves saying that we do love God, the repeated question forces us to look beneath the surface of our response to see what we mean by it." Jesus repeatedly asks Peter if Peter loves him. **What are the responses by Peter and Jesus? What is Jesus saying to his followers?**

3. Love God. Love others. **In your own life, which part of the commandment is currently calling for more attention? Why?**

4. John Wesley said, "God is the joy of our heart, and the desire of our soul, which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is none upon the earth that I desire but you!' My God, and my all! You are the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!" **The love of God is the orienting center for all that we are and all that we do. How have you found the love of God to be your orienting center? Or...maybe the love of God is not your orienting center. What would life look like with love of God at the center?**

5. Methodist Christians move beyond "churchianity" to Christianity. Moving from "membership" (as good as it is) to discipleship, following Jesus. Steve Harper reminds us:

Many of the people to whom Wesley ministered were already members of a congregation. To them, he exhorted a deeper life in Christ, one that included, but transcended institutional identification. To those who were outside the church, he called them to become members of a Christian community somewhere, but to see it as a means to the greater end of loving God regardless of institutional affiliation.

What implications do our Methodist roots have on how we are church today? Why is it important to continue to aspire for the love of God as the goal?

LIVING IT OUT

What can we do for the love of God to be grown in our lives, hearts, minds, and church? The Holy Spirit gives grace as we participate in the ordinances of God. As we participate, the Holy Spirit works through that participation, growing love for God and love for others.

1. What are the ordinances of God/practices that grow love for God? How do you orient your life around love of God?

2. E. Stanley Jones said, "When I met Jesus, I felt that I had swallowed sunshine."

When has practicing any of the ordinances of God felt like "swallowing sunshine"?

(corporate worship, ministry of the Word, communion, family and private prayer, personal searching of the scriptures)

3. What can you do to participate in these ordinances and have them be life giving, exciting, fun experiences?

PRAYER

Ask the Holy Spirit to grow your love for God and love for others. Make a commitment to God to participate in an ordinance of God this week. If in a group: share prayer requests with each other and pray for each other. Pray for the "empty chair," for those who are not yet with our group/our church. Thank God for the transforming work that God has done and is yet to do in our lives, families, the community, and the world.