

Text: [James 5:13-20 \(CEB\)](#)
Date: May 12, 2024 – Mother’s Day
Title: “Stay in Love With God”
Theme: We approach God not just seeking a blessing, but seeking a relationship.

1

Being a parent is difficult
Especially as your kids get older, it’s hard to always know
how to calibrate the relationship
When to try and lean in to connection, and when to give
space
When to step in and help manage a situation, and when to
let things play out
When it’s necessary to offer a word of correction, versus
times it’s better to just let things slide

On this Mother’s Day, I think it’s good to acknowledge all
the ways in which the parent/child relationship mimics
so many of our other relationships
We overlay it with all the weight that comes from our
responsibilities of caring for kids through their most
vulnerable years
And then the way we feel a sense of responsibility for our
own parents as they get older

But at it’s core, the ebb and flow of it is similar to any other
relationship: it’s always about navigating closeness
and distance

Now how does this connect to what we've been talking about?

Remember, these past few weeks have been about Wesley's General Rules:

1 - Do no harm

2 – Do good

And 3 – Stay in love with God

Today, I want to talk about that love-relationship we have with our Creator

Which is again, not dramatically different than what we experience with our parents

2

My own relationship with God has been marked by that same dynamic – closeness and distance

People might think that a pastor's spiritual life is one of constant communion with God

The ideal, perhaps – but not real

Of course, I have experienced many times when God felt incredibly close:

Certainly, in the early days of my call, as I wrestled with how and why I was supposed to walk away from my former career

We were in constant communication

I really felt as though every step along the way was guided and led by the Spirit during my transition from North Carolina to New Jersey

So many moments in seminary – especially during chapel,
or maybe working in small groups with other students
I heard God in those worship services, and in those
heartfelt interactions

I've certainly felt God in the churches I've served
In one church, I led a praise band
We'd get together and work on a new piece, and for a
while it would just be total frustration
Until you finally feel it coming together in a moment of
connection with God and each other that is its own
form of praise

Here in this church I've experienced it over and over again
with families when their loved ones are in the hospital
When we've worked together to accomplish something
important –
Like when we built the Family Life Center, or when we've
completed a week of Vacation Bible School
I've felt God's presence when we've celebrated the
ministry of beloved staff members and heard how
their work has inspired others

Now, it's not always easy
There are times when God feels far away
The pandemic was tough
Coming back after the pandemic was perhaps even
tougher

Because it just felt like nothing was working
People weren't yet ready to step up to volunteer
We had almost no kids coming back
And critics sometimes seemed to outnumber the
encouragers
I know I wasn't alone in wondering:
Will anything ever work again?

It's easy in those times to look around
When you are so desperately trying to be faithful
So desperately seeking a blessing

And reach the conclusion that "God has abandoned me"
That God has abandoned us
To decide that Jesus has walked away
And no blessing is forthcoming

It's in those moments when it's helpful to remember a
lesson we often learn most clearly in our relationship
with our parents
A relationship can't be based solely on another's ability to
give you all the things you want
At exactly the time you want them
Because in every relationship, there are moments when
the most appropriate response to a request is either
"no" or "not yet"

3

Staying in love with God takes for granted that we are
mature enough to understand that
That we don't see God as simply a means to gain the
things we desire
That we won't love God only during times of blessing
But at all times

James makes this point in his letter today
By saying that no matter what's happening
Prayer is always the appropriate response

If you are suffering, what should you do? Pray.
What if you are happy and celebrating? Pray. More
specifically, sing!
What if you are sick? Then have someone pray over you.
What if you've made a mistake? Call together folks you
trust and confess.
James' starting point is that prayer works.
That it matters.
And that it allows us to call on all the power of God.

But there are some things to consider here, like the idea
that we find in verse 15:
"Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the
Lord will restore them to health"
Or in verse 16: "The prayer of the righteous person is
powerful in what it can achieve"

It's important not to allow these verses to lead us to a
place where we mistake or misunderstand where the
power actually comes from
It's not us

4

James doesn't invite us to prayer in every situation as a
way of saying: "here's how you get what you want"
That's not what prayer is about
James invites us into prayer because this is how we stay
in love with God
It's how we continue the relationship

Because where there is no communication, there is no
connection

If you want to be close to a person, you talk to them
If you want to be close to Jesus, you pray to him

The relationship is primary, and that's what James is
calling us to

Whether we're healthy or whether we're sick
Whether we've got money coming in or bills piling up
Whether we're on top of the world or in the depths of
despair

In our families, in our spiritual lives
It's all the same: to stay in love is to keep talking

5

Now I know there are a number of folks here who are new
to church

Or who are maybe coming back for the first time in a while

So I want this to be practical

And Wesley had several ideas about how we stay in love
with God

You're already doing the first thing – which is to worship

Worship as often as you can

If you miss, catch up after

You can always find worship, or just the message

In the app, on the website, or on our YouTube channel

That's a starting point

But beyond that, most of Wesley's suggestions have
something to do with prayer

Prayer – by yourself, with your family, in a small group

Is the basis of our connection

Start small – pray before meals or before bed

Carve out a few quiet moments in your day to think, to
speak, to write out your prayers

Find one person to be your prayer partner – where you
pray with and for each other

You want to stay in love with Jesus?

Then talk to him

It's that simple

The other set of Wesley's recommendations mostly have
to do with the scriptures – because that's one of the
most important ways God has chosen to talk to us
It's one place we can go to reliably hear the Spirit
speaking

Now, I know the Bible can be intimidating
But trust me, you don't need to have a degree to
understand it

Just start with Matthew, then read Mark, Luke, and John
Begin with the words of Jesus in the gospels
Or read a Daily Devotional – we publish one Monday-
Friday on our website and in the app

6

Will you always feel super connected to God? No.
Just like in any other relationship, you'll have moments
that are beautiful
And other moments when you feel angry or disappointed
Times you feel close, and times when God feels distant

Your relationship to God will change and grow
and ebb and flow throughout your life
And that's ok

What's important is that we do all we can to stay in love
To keep coming back
We don't approach God just to seek a blessing
We approach God seeking a relationship

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ