



How *is it*
with *your*
SOUL?

First United Methodist Church
1100 Central Avenue
Hot Springs, AR 71901
(501) 623-6668
www.fumchotsprings.org



HOW IS IT WITH YOUR SOUL?

When Methodists were asked this question in their small group, over two hundred years ago, they were encouraged not only to share how they felt, but more importantly how they were living. Our outward actions are an indication and a determinate of our inner life. To help guide the discussions, John Wesley developed the General Rules. These rules still guide our lives and our relationships today, and are designed to help us stay connected to God, to each other, and to the world.

We would like for you to join us this year in practicing these rules. When we join together in worship and in small groups, we will ask each other “How is it with your soul?” This question is asked in true concern for each other and our relationship with God.

We encourage you in your family unit and small groups to practice sharing with each other these questions, hold each other up when we are able to live out of them in holiness and justice, and encouraging each other when we find ourselves lacking. We are a people who believe that God can provide grace in our lives that makes us more perfect in love, we just have to be diligent in our practice and discipline.

Relationships are hard work (with God and others); they require time and commitment. As Bishop Ruben Job says, these rules are “simple, but not easy!” Good relationships don’t happen overnight, and require a lifetime of showing up. We hope these rules become a regular part of your life. We guarantee that if you practice them, you will grow in your relationship with God and others.

We want to help you learn more and enable you make this a daily part of your life. This booklet provides a general overview of these rules. Our website has resources to help you grow and live out of these rules.

**My soul
is tired...
I feel
distanced
from God...
I am
anxious...**

HOW HAVE YOU STAYED CONNECTED TO OTHERS?

HOW DID YOU DO NO HARM?

First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind. This rule seems easy enough, until we take it seriously. John Wesley went on to say:

“especially that which is most generally practiced, such as: The taking of the name of God in vain, not keeping the Sabbath holy, drunkenness, fighting, quarreling, brawling, doing to others as we would not have them do unto us, doing what we know is not for the glory of God such as wearing costly apparel, the singing of songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God, softness and needless self-indulgence, laying up treasure on earth, and borrowing without a probability of paying.”

This list was adapted and shortened, but can be expanded based on our current lifestyles. What are the things in your life that do you or others harm?

If we were to take this question seriously, we would constantly evaluate how we use our time, gifts and money. What we watch, what we do, where we spend our time all are indications of where our heart is. Do we think about our lives as God’s servant to “do good”?

Ignatius encouraged a form of prayer called Examen.

This prayer involves spending time each day reviewing the day with God. If we are honest before God, we can examine our lives and allow God’s grace to show us how we can grow in our love for others and for ourselves.

We can trust God, because God wants the very best for us. By being honest with ourselves, we become more aware of the Holy Spirit’s guidance throughout our day.

Asking this question will require a change of habits, an intentional examination of your routines, a dedication to growing more perfect in love, and a holiness of life!

HOW HAVE YOU STAYED CONNECTED TO OTHERS?

HOW DID YOU DO GOOD?

Secondly: By doing good, by being in every way merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men.

John Wesley utilized Jesus' example in Matthew 25:35-40 (MSG) to expound on what this rule meant. *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me,*

I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.'

"Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'

John Wesley said the above passage meant we should use the resources that we have to give food to the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to visit or help those who are sick or in prison. By doing this good with each other through encouragement and helping hold each other accountable, we ensure that our actions do not make others disdain Christianity. By denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily, we submit to bear the reproach of Christ. We are willing to sacrifice our lives and endure hardships for others and this world in the name of Christ.

Examining where we "do good" requires that we understand the needs of our world and seek to serve others.

Asking this question will require that you truly notice others in your daily routines, and that you set aside time to regularly serve those whom you wouldn't normally come in contact with.

HOW HAVE YOU STAYED CONNECTED TO GOD?

God has provided us the Means of Grace that keep us connected and allow us to grow in our relationship with God. Bishop Ruben Job says these are ways that help us to stay in love with God. For John Wesley there were many Means of Grace, but he stressed particularly those that Jesus had named: worship, Holy Communion, study of Scripture, private and public prayer, and fasting. If we were to translate these into questions for our day and time we might ask the following:

Did you attend worship?

Did you encourage other Christians?

Did you read and study your Bible?

Did you pray?

Did you consciously set aside something so you could be with God?

We many times stay connected to God dependent on our feelings. But staying connected to God is like any other relationship and it involves a 24/7 commitment. If you begin to *feel* like God is distant or that you are *not getting something out of worship*, or that *prayer is hard*, you should re-examine the questions above. If you are not committing to these opportunities for God's grace to help you grow spiritually, you will begin to feel dissonance and disconnection. This feeling of separation is the opportunity for you to re-examine and re-orient your calendar and your lifestyle to include the opportunities for God's grace in your life.

How willing are you to change your routine and calendar to commit to God? Are you willing to put these Means of Grace above all other priorities in your life?

Asking these questions may require that you give up something precious or desirable to be with God.

HOW IS IT WITH YOUR SOUL?

How did you Stay Connected to Others?

Did You Do No Harm?
Did You Do Good?

How Did You Stay Connected to God?

Did you attend Worship?
Did you encourage other Christians?
Did you read and study your Bible?
Did you pray?
Did you consciously set aside something so you could be with God?

SOUL TALK : FAMILY STYLE!

Staying connected to God and others follows the instructions of Jesus in the Great Commandment, Matthew 22:37. This is based on Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Following the command in Deuteronomy is instructions on how to live them and teach them to your children:

Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (MSG)

We encourage you to talk to your children daily about how they are staying connected to others and to God. Before they go to sleep, while at the dinner table or in the car, ask them how their day went. Did they have opportunities to do good? Did they do something that prevented harm? Read a Bible story together, pray out loud together before dinner and before they go to sleep, and ask them if they encouraged someone.

Use your daily routines to talk about how each family member is staying connected. Inspire each other and hold each other accountable.