

STUDY GUIDE

Monday, May 1 - Read 1 John 4:7-12. When we read these verses we are taken back in our minds to John 3:16. John references his first comments about God loving us and reminds us time and time again in all of his writings that we are LOVED by God. This is our identity. We all have the same name - *BELOVED*. All of our relationships begin and end with this - God loves us. And because we are loved by God, we should (in response to God's love) love others. Take a few moments today to let this sink in - "I am loved...by the Creator of the Universe!" Write the word "beloved" on a note card, post-it note, somewhere where you see it everyday, or make it the background on your computer screen or phone. Each time you see the word "beloved" respond to those around you with the same kind of love God extended to you.

Tuesday, May 2 - Read Psalm 103. Go back and notice verses 3,4,8,10,12. See the theme of God's mercy. This past Sunday, a shovel was used as a metaphor for God's mercy. God heaps mercy on us with a shovel, not a spoon. So, let's try to put this metaphor to work for us this week. Get a shovel and put the word "mercy" on the blade in some way (write it, post-it note or piece of paper). Next, put the shovel in a place in which you will see it each day and will be able to see the word 'mercy' on it. (You can also use a spade or small shovel and put it in the car/office). Let this be a visual reminder of the mercy, grace and love that God has for you. God's mercy is new every morning, so let this be a daily reminder of that fact. Receive God's unconditional grace and love. It's for you. No strings attached. No matter what. By the shovel-full. The primary shaper of our ability to have a meaningful and successful relationship with ourselves and with other people around us is our ability to receive what God wants to give us.

Wednesday, May 3 - What is the greatest commandment? "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it; 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*" **Matthew 22:37-39.** For us to have healthy relationships, we need to be able to love God AND love ourselves. If the way we love ourselves is off, it could alter our other relationships as well. We are challenged to love God through worship, prayer, service to others and simply hanging out with people who believe like we do. How do we cultivate the practice of "loving ourselves?" So today, this weekend, do something for yourself. Do something that gives you life and restores you. Pay attention to anything God shows you during this time.

Thursday, May 4 - Can we actually help our relationships by being alone? Is there a benefit to solitude when it comes to making our relationships stronger? Jesus, after his baptism, went (alone) into the wilderness. **Read Matthew 4:1-11.** There is a belief that if we can learn how to be alone and be comfortable in that state, we will be help in related to others for the rest of our lives. Check out Sherry Turkle's remarks on Ted.com (https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together). What do you think about what she said about how technology is not just changing what we do but who we are? Is she right about solitude?

Friday, May 5 - Read Matthew 20:1-16. When we read this parable for the first time, most likely are instincts kick in and we will say, "That's not fair!" "That's not right!" But many of us view it from the perspective of the early workers who toiled all day. But the focus of this parable is not the workers as much as the landowner - the one who was generous and kept inviting more and more to work when there was work to be done. From the readings this week and the message last Sunday, the focus is on a good God, who is generous, who is merciful and who is gracious. What have you received from God? What then can you offer in your relationships because of what you God has given you?