

Monday, May 15 - Read Mark 12:28-31. By Jesus' time, the Jews had accumulated hundreds of law - 613 by one historian's count. Some religious leaders tired to distinguish between major and minor laws, and some taught that all laws were equally binding that it was dangerous to make any distinctions. This teacher's question could have provoked controversy among these groups, but Jesus' answer summarized all of God's laws. God's laws are not burdensome. They can be reduced to two simple principles: love God and love others. These commands are from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). When you love God completely and care for others as you care for yourself, then you have fulfilled the intent of the Ten Commandments and the other Old Testament laws. According to Jesus, these two commandments summarize all God's laws. Let them rule your thoughts, decisions, and actions. When you are uncertain about what to do, ask yourself which course of action best demonstrates love for God and love for others.

Tuesday, May 16 - Read Matthew 22:37. Jesus knew there was a powerful dynamic between the way we love God, the way we love our neighbor, and the way we love ourselves. They all go together. If one gets out of whack, overemphasized, or neglected, it can throw the other two off balance - and vice versa. It is therefore, critical that we learn to properly love ourselves, because with that piece, we will stay out of balance. How are you doing at loving the person in the mirror? Is it easy or hard for you to love yourself? Have you ever worried that you were not worth loving? Remember what God says about you: 1. I love you. 2. I'm thankful for you. 3. You are a rare and beautiful treasure. 4. I forgive you. 5. You are here for a special purpose. 6. I am holding you to a high standard. 7. I believe in you.

Wednesday, May 17 - Read Isaiah 49:16. God is for you. Not "may be," not "has been," not "was," not "would be," but "God is!" He is for you. Today. At this hour. At this minute. As you read this sentence. No need to wait in line or come back tomorrow. He is with you. He could not be closer than he is at this second. His loyalty won't increase if you are better nor lessen if you are worse. He is for you. God is for you. Turn to the sidelines; that's God cheering your run. Look past the finish line; that's God applauding your steps. Listen for him in the bleachers, shouting your name. Too tired to continue? He'll carry you. Too discouraged to fight? He's picking you up. God is for you. God is for you. Had he a calendar, your birthday would be circled. If he drove a car, your name would be on his bumper. If there's a tree in heaven, he's carved your name in the bark. We know he has a tattoo, and we know what it says. "I have written your name on my hand," he declares (Isaiah 49:16). So when we think everyone is against us, we have at least three cheering us on - God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. If they are for you, why aren't YOU for YOU!

Thursday, May 18 - Read Matthew 3:13-17. The voice of God proclaims to the world, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." One of the things so radical about this proclamation is that it happens at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. No healing thus far. No miracles. No prayers. No sermons. No parables. Nothing aside from just being a person who trusts God with everything he's got. In other words, Jesus has value to God, and he hasn't produced anything yet. This is important because even though Jesus was fully God at his baptism, God's pleasure was not in response to that quality. No, God's pleasure, love, and acceptance came in spite of what Jesus could or would do. Jesus did not earn God's favor and love - it just came to him as a gift, not a reward. And that is how it comes to us as well. Do you believe it and can you accept it?

Friday, May 19 - The organization To Write Love on Her arms (TWLOHA) is a great example of the way God is healing past pain and teaching people to love themselves as he does. TWLOHA is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOHA inspires individuals and invests directly in treatment and recovery. It is a pretty amazing organization doing real life-saving work. Read the information about their ministry at <https://twloha.com/learn>. How does telling people that they are not alone in their pain help to heal them? TWLOHA says, "We often ask God to show up. We pray prayers of rescue. Perhaps God would ask us to be that rescue, to be his body, to move for things that matter." Do you agree with this? How is an organization like TWLOHA partnering with God's work of making things on earth the way they are in heaven? **Read Matthew 6:10.**