

First Fifteen: January 3-7
Focus Scripture: Luke 3:15-17 & 21-22

Monday: Isaiah 42:5-9

Going Deeper: It is a new year, and yet there is much that still lingers from the one which is now past. I don't know about you, but at times it is hard to let go of the lingering past, which hinders my ability to embrace what is ahead. As I hear these words from the Hebrew Prophet Isaiah, I hear them with an overshadowing of what I understand and experience in Jesus. This is especially true of Isaiah 42:1-4. The Messiah has come, his message and his life have touched our lives. Although there appears to be a shift in Isaiah's words in verses 5-9... I hear a call to us, the people of God who have spent the last month listening to the message of God's salvation for all through the coming of God's Son. I encourage you to notice specifically verses 8 & 9... *"I am the LORD; that is my name; I don't hand out my glory to others or my praise to idols. The things announced in the past – look – they've already happened, but I'm declaring new things. Before they even appear, I tell you about them."* (Isa. 42:8-9 – CEB) It is a new year with new opportunities, the promise of God revealed to us in the incarnation is ever before us! It has happened and it continues to happen in our lives as we embrace the message of God's healing love and allow it to move through us for others.

Prayer: Each morning gives me a renewed opportunity grow closer to you, my God. Each day provided challenges to help me practice my faith and grow deeper in my trust in your love for me. Use me throughout this year to join your work of healing restoration for all who bare your image, even if they do not recognize it in themselves. Guide my path, open my heart, and help me see this world as you do. Amen.

Tuesday: Isaiah 52:7-10

Going Deeper: We often attribute these words of Isaiah referring to others, specifically John the Baptist, or even Jesus. In context Isaiah may have had in mind the messengers who carried the news of battle from the front line sharing messages of hope or victory! They call us to do the same, to share the Good News of God's comfort and mercy. We all are messengers of hope and healing as we share our story of God's restorative touch upon us. We share the message of God's good news by telling others how, or where we witness God at work in our lives, or by sharing how God's peace came to us and lead us through our moments of loss, worry or defeat. Do not sell yourself short! You are God's messenger, we all are... and most especially when we do so from a place of humility understanding it was God's loving kindness and mercy that lead the way. We don't have to have all the answers, or all our lose ends tied up! All that is required is an open heart and trusting spirit. Don't believe me, look at 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

Prayer: My God of mercy and strength, help me to be patient with others, as well as myself. Help me trust your work is going on within and around me through your Spirit. Help me have faith, even when I struggle to see beyond what I think may be a bad outcome... trusting your

sight is beyond mine. Help me be your messenger of hope as I yield myself to you and your leading, for that is when I am most useful to you, as well as others. Amen.

Wednesday: Isaiah 46:5-13

Going Deeper: As I read these words, I hear a playfulness. No doubt, they are serious in their call for us to examine where we place our hope and on what we trust will provide us with what we feel we need. Although, they seem to poke fun at the efforts we have made to create wellbeing for ourselves. I hear this most clearly in Eugene Peterson's rendering of Isaiah's words from *The Message*: *"They carry it around in holy parades, then take it home and put it on a shelf. And there it sits, day in and day out, a dependable god, always right where you put it. Say anything you want to it, it never talks back. Of course, it never does anything either!"* (The Message - Isa. 46:7) Isaiah ends his message with a word of hope and reassurance for us all. He calls us to acknowledge we all are stubborn or as the Common English Bible translates his words... *"Listen to me, you bullheaded people..."* (Isa. 46:12) Even so he tells us God has drawn near bringing the hope of salvation and restoration to us. Again, in context, for Isaiah the idea of salvation was focused on setting our lives right, in alignment with God's desire for us... leading you and me to discover freedom from all that holds us captive. What might this mean for you?

Prayer: All knowing One, you already know where I have hidden my idols, those things I trust to give me happiness, or a sense of wellbeing and purpose. Even so your love continues to reach out to me. Help me release these into your loving mercy and grab hold of a faith in you and your provision for me, my family, and all I hold dear. Amen.

Thursday: Hebrews 1:1-4

Going Deeper: The author of the New Testament letter we know as Hebrews has one focus, to share the message that through Jesus God has revealed God's nature and intention to restore our world through mercy and grace. The verse that truly catches my attention is Hebrews 1:3a... *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."* (NIV) What do you hear about Jesus from this description? I encourage you to read it in several translations. I suspect this description could create within you a disconnect between Jesus' humanity and our belief in his divinity. We must hold on to Jesus' humanity strongly. He was a human being just like us, and yet Jesus *"perfectly mirrors God, and is stamped with God's nature."* (The Message) The author of Hebrews also tells us that Jesus holds all things together through his words, or teaching; meaning his message about God leads us to the clearest picture of how to live our lives well and in alignment with God's purpose and intention for our lives. I encourage to embrace this understanding of Jesus, even if it remains unclear in your heart and mind. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read these verses again. Pay attention where you are drawn, what words or phrases rise off the page as you read these verses. Then, simply ask what is it I need to hear Lord.

Prayer: *“Dear Jesus, in whose life I see all that I would, but fail to be, let thy clear light forever shine, to guide this life of mine. Through what I dream and what I do in my weak days are always two, help me, oppressed by things undone, O thou whose deeds and dreams were one.”* Amen (UM Hymnal #468 – Dear Jesus, in Whose Life I See.)

Friday: 1 John 1:1-4

Going Deeper: These words from 1st John speak about a personal, intimate knowing. They reveal something we may believe is beyond us now. We can't know Jesus in the same way these 1st disciples did, but that does not mean we can't have an intimate relationship with him. Our knowing will obviously be different, we can't say we have seen Jesus with our eyes, or touched him with our hands, but we can share how our hearts have been warmed by his love, and our spirits have been lifted and filled with a peace that is beyond our own ability to create. As we begin this new year together, I pray these fifteen minutes you spend each day will draw you closer to God. I hope you too can say “I know God is with me and I have fellowship with him through my connection to his word, and the Holy Spirit in my time of prayer.” These are the building blocks of our faith, and they create a foundation that will last even when our lives are shaken.

Prayer: *“Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn; through the storm, through the night, lead me to the light: Take my hand, precious Lord lead me home.”* Amen. (UM Hymnal #474 – Precious Lord, Take My Hand)