

## First Fifteen: September 6-10

### Monday: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

**Going Deeper:** These words attributed to Paul reveal his profound self-awareness garnered from the lessons of his life. It is quite interesting to hear Paul, even though he was a Pharisee, and a leader of his faith, express he was ignorant and without faith prior to his experience with the risen Christ. (See Acts 9:1-31 to read his story.) His experience of God, and his understanding of the Messiah were completely overturned, and so was his response. He went from an antagonist to a defender, from disbelief to complete acceptance. In humility he realized his experience was an example for others to learn from and follow.

**Prayer:** Loving and merciful Lord, as this new week begins help me learn from the lessons of last week. Help me be attentive to what I need to learn about your love and how it changes and challenges me. Help me listen for and receive what you desire to teach me. Help me be aware that my life, my faith and even my failures are lessons and examples for others to learn about your mercy and grace. Thank you, Lord for this day. Be my guide and light. Amen.

### Tuesday: Genesis 50:15-21

**Going Deeper:** In our reading today, we have yet again another story of humility and awareness gained through hard and unjust lessons from life. (See Genesis 37 for the beginning of Joseph's story.) These verses in Genesis 50 begin with a continuation of Joseph's brothers' guilt and fear, but they are not the focus of the lesson. Joseph's ability to let go of his fear and anger have led him to realize all of life's circumstances, both the high and low, have helped him be the person God desired him to become. He understood God used everything, that the bumps and hardships of life were not a sign of God's anger or abandonment, in the same way the moments when life was easy and good were not necessarily a sign of God blessing. Joseph's faith teaches us God's love and presence is never ending and always available for us.

**Prayer:** You O God who are ever present, help us to remember you reveal yourself to us most clearly through life, death, and resurrection. Open my mind to accept this truth, holding firmly to my faith no matter how this day unfolds. Knowing you are at work and present in every moment. Fill me with your peace, and confident hope through this day. Amen.

### Wednesday: James 2:1-5

**Going Deeper:** The New Testament Letter we know as James has a way of cutting right to the chase! The teaching and instruction in this short letter call the followers of Jesus to be consciously attentive to how our actions reveal the impact of our faith upon how we now see and respond to the people we meet. James reminds his listeners that through faith, and our response to God's love, reorient how we respond and react to what we value and how we receive and react to others. Again, God is at work within us, turning the everyday moments of our lives into opportunities to learn and grow; helping us see the true nature and impact of our lives. Take a moment to think about that, then

invite God to open your mind, and heart to help you live with intention and curiosity to discover the surprises and lessons of this day.

**Prayer:** God of wonder and mystery, help me see value in every moment of this day. Help me be attentive to your presence as they pass. Open my eyes to see the people who enter my life, taking the risk to engage them, even if that means we only share a passing glance and a smile. Lord, your love is given to all, help me seek to value all your children, in the same way I value my own life. May this day be enriched with opportunities to learn and share your love. Amen.

#### **Thursday: James 2:14-18**

**Going Deeper:** James again calls us on the carpet. His point is direct, his words may even feel somewhat rude and abrupt. He seems to be taunting the followers of Jesus by suggesting, *"You say you have faith... then prove it!"* I get his point, as I have met people throughout my career as a minister, I have heard similar responses. They often have no problem with Jesus, or what he taught, but they say they see a disconnect in what he said and what we do. The question that is raised is valid, *"My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show?"* (James 2:14 – CEB) So how do we show our faith? Well, with humility, through kindness and compassion, and openness to what others think as we listen to their experience might be a good place to begin.

**Prayer:** Our Lord of abundant love, whose well of mercy never runs dry, forgive me for my moments when what I say I believe and how I respond to the needs of others do not align. Help my life and the choices I make this day to be a vessel for your love and kindness to flow through me. Help me remember as someone wiser than me once said, people would rather see a sermon than hear one. May my actions speak more clearly than my words this day, for you and your son, Jesus. Amen.

#### **Friday: Psalm 116:1-9**

**Going Deeper:** As we end our week, I encourage you to read these words of the Psalmist several times, maybe even have them handy to read throughout the day. I am drawn to the cry of the Psalmist, *"I love the Lord because God hears me... I call out to God because God listens closely to me."* No matter how this week has unfolded my prayer is that you know God does hear you, that God listens to you and that God's love is present in every situation you face. May you find encouragement in the Psalmist's faith that declares I will embrace God's peace, and trust God's guidance to keep me from stumbling as I live my life before the Lord in the everyday realities of this day.

**Prayer:** Another week has past, more lessons were learned, and opportunities were presented to live true to my faith. Lord, I thank you for your grace. I thank you for this week and I thank you for the new day reminding me of your steadfast love. Give me time to rest this weekend, help me be present with those I love, as well as attentive to my own needs so I may continue to grow in the knowledge of your grace and share the wonder of your love in all I do. Amen.