

First Fifteen: February 21-25
Focus Scripture: Luke 9:28-36

Monday: Romans 12:1-2

Going Deeper: Why is change so hard? I have been told people seek change in their lives either because they have a drive and desire to create something better than their current circumstances, or because to remain within them creates more pain than they can bare. I am also told most of us often allow change to happen without actively entering into its process. The central message of our faith is grounded in God's call to become the People of God, a Light for others to see and are drawn to... a city set upon a hill. To become a city on a hill, those whose lives shed and reflect the light of God into the darkness of our world we must allow or be open to change which Paul calls transformation. These two verses in the opening of Romans 12 set the tone for Paul's teaching in the rest of this chapter. I encourage you to read them several times from different translations. What do you hear Paul saying to you? What steps does he lay before us to help us experience a renewing of our minds? What do you think he means by this description of transformation and what does he tell us the end result will be? The transformation of which Paul is speaking is not a passive experience, it requires our engagement in ways we often do not think of as effort. There are three movements as I understand his teaching. The first is simply to be open or present with a desire to be attentive to what God is doing. The second is to resist the common, natural pull of events, or in other words don't simply go with the flow. The third is to be open to repentance as a way of life rather than a one-time event. Repentance is far more than simply turning around or away from something... it also involves an opening of our mind, the way we think about, see, and engage the world around us.

Prayer: Lord of all love, help me be a light for you today. Guide me with your gentle nudge within by your abiding presence. Help me be attentive, aware of where and how I feel your movement and presence today. Give me a hungry heart, an attentive mind, and a willing spirit. Amen.

Tuesday: Romans 12:3-5

Going Deeper: Paul moves from our individual response to God's call to become a community where our lives as an individual now build upon everyone else within the one body of Christ. None of us is "The Shining Light," we are part of the vessel from which the light of God shines. Our individual lives and abilities are immensely important and needed as each adds to the other like building blocks... but Paul is quick to encourage us to not take ourselves too seriously! Within the body of Christ, which is one of Paul's most descriptive names for those who have formed as a community with one another around their shared faith in Jesus, we are not to seek status or privilege over one another. He tells us we each have our own role, gift, and ability to share and in this sharing of mutuality "*we belong to each other.*" (Romans 12:5b – CEB) Although this description may sound somewhat foreign to what we understand as the church today, I hope you will consider how and where you create this belonging within body of Christ

for one another here at Centenary. (If you want to dig a little deeper consider verses 6-8 as Paul lays out a few ways we as the body of Christ support and serve one another.)

Prayer: My God who seeks to create belonging for all, help me accept I am part of your work. Help me see where I create belonging for others and how I then receive it from them? Show me where does this happen most often for me and what can I do to help my community share it more deeply. Amen.

Wednesday: Romans 12:9-12

Going Deeper: Most translations begin Romans 12:9 with love must be sincere, or love must be genuine or authentic... Again, I really like the way the Message renders Paul's instruction: *"Love from the center of who you are."* The word Paul used in Romans 12:9 for love was "agape." It is often described as unconditional love, or love without strings that expects something in return. We describe and understand God's love for us as being unconditional. The love we know and experience from God flows from God's character. God's nature is simply best described as love! This is also what Paul seems to be asking of those who are Christ followers, to be known as those whose character and interactions with others is expressed as loving, kind, and merciful. In other words, we *"Love from the center of who we are!"* What would that look like for you? How is loving kindness most evident in your actions and/or responses? Another aspect of genuine or sincere love is made evident when we are aware of those places and experiences when we were not at our best. Romans 12:12 give us guidance for these moments... never lose sight of hope, then by digging in stay grounded by reaching deep for your foundation when you are faced with challenges and finally by holding onto God's embrace and love for you through prayer.

Prayer: My loving God, flow through me today out into the lives of those I meet. Help me be attentive to the places I come up short, where I am not acting from a loving center. In those moments may your love guide me to stay focused on you, the hope you always create, as I dig deep into the roots of my faith to tap into your love and in this discover your embrace. Amen.

Thursday: Romans 12:13-17

Going Deeper: In these verses Paul lays down the basics of community. They describe the realities of community, acknowledging that we do not always agree or even get along. In these moments Paul calls us to rise above these situations to create space where disagreement is allowed because we know at the center of our lives, we see one another as equals before God and within the community we know as the body of Christ. These words of instruction also call us to practice our love for others with tangible acts of compassion and care. These acts are evident as we extend not merely kind words of support but also actively engage in the physical, emotional, and spiritual care of others when it is required of us and as we feel the push of the Spirit to do so. We do not need to respond to every need, but I suspect you have felt the nudge to engage, it starts as an awareness and grows into a desire to respond. I suspect the same thing is true when we

find ourselves in a disagreement. If we can stay alert as these places have been triggered, those moments that we feel personal affront and where our anger rises in a greater proportion than the situation seems to illicit, the Spirit will help us let go so we can respond from a place of loving kindness and see the other as an equal and one who is loved by God, just as we are.

Prayer: Lord of mercy, your love is present always and everywhere. In moments of hard discussions and disagreement help me not get caught up in the flow of negative energy and instead seek your presence and the guidance of grace to lead me. Amen.

Friday: Romans 12:18-21

Going Deeper: I have often wondered if John Wesley considered these words from Romans 12:18-21 as he reflected on what we know as the 3 Simple Rules: “Do no harm. Do good and use the practices of our faith.” I have modified the wording of third rule, I believe this wording is more precise for our understanding. Both Paul and John Wesley knew how easily it is to get caught up disagreements, allowing the emotion of the moment to lead us into behavior or verbiage that when looked upon in hindsight we regret. This being the case they both begin with an admonition to be aware and considerate of the needs of others. Paul calls us to allow room for grace, and the flow of God’s Holy Spirit to work within our broken and wounded relationships. Paul’s use of Proverbs 25:21-22 has been something I have wrestled with to understand. It sounds as if it is an excuse to pour salt into the wounds of the one who has wronged me, taking advantage of my adversary when they are vulnerable and in need. These words are instead a call to love and compassion, they invite us to engage our enemy not in what they might expect when they are down, and in a moment of advantage over them. They direct us as a fellow human being to lay aside our differences and show compassion and kindness. I suspect the result is an opening of both our hearts and by God’s grace a moment of transformation.

Prayer: If possible, to the best of my ability my God and savior, I will seek peace with my brothers and sisters in every situation. Today I will set out to follow your path that leads me into your arms of love. I pray this not merely for myself, but in the service of your son, Jesus my Christ. Amen.