

## First Fifteen: September 13-17

### Monday: Luke 10:38-42

**Going Deeper:** I am easily distracted; I have been that way my entire life. When I was a child, my distractibility was attributed to being “hyperactive with a side of attention deficit.” Today we simply refer to it as ADHD. Distractibility is a real thing, for some it is harder to manage than others, but this story in Luke is not a reference to a medical condition. The story of Mary and Martha is about priorities and where we focus our attention based upon what we understand as being most important. Jesus tells Martha *“One thing is necessary.”* His words were not meant to be critical, as much as instructional. Martha’s concern for the care of her guests was important, and culturally relevant. Jesus’ question asks us to consider what we allow to direct our choices and guide our behavior is truly necessary and of the greatest importance for our lives? There are many things we must do; this story invites us to begin to ask if we allow these “important” tasks to distract us from what is truly necessary?

**Prayer:** A new week has begun, our God of wisdom and mercy, help me throughout this day to consider what is important and necessary within the tasks and obligations I will face. Help me to have clarity on what is both important and necessary, so I do not become distracted. Help me to not be concerned about what others are doing or not doing, and so I will stay focused on what I need to do. Amen.

### Tuesday: Matthew 20:1-16

**Going Deeper:** In this parable of Jesus, in its teaching about “the Kingdom of God,” we are often drawn to the day laborers and their wages. We might find ourselves pulled toward the vineyard owner who continued looking for day laborers throughout the day and we must assume he told each group their pay would be the same as what he had told the original group from first light. As you read this teaching something else may have caught your attention. I encourage you to linger with the phrase, word or words that drew you in, inviting the Spirit of God to lead you to its message for you. One thing I have become more attentive to, especially since Jesus used the parables to help his followers better understand God’s desire for us, as well as leading us more deeply into the nature of the Kingdom, is what does this parable tell us about our role in sharing the transformational message that those who are last will be first and those who are first will be last. Jesus’ words are striking, we hear them, but have we allowed them to sink in, asking what are you saying Lord, what is it that I need to hear?

**Prayer:** Lord or life, you who hold the universe within your love, help me live this day with my focus reaching beyond my own needs to see the needs and lives of others. Help me Lord to hear your message of the Kingdom and its priorities that challenges my own. Help me listen for your leading and lean into your call so I will receive your generosity graciously. Amen.

### **Wednesday: Ecclesiastes 9:11-18**

**Going Deeper:** The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us to remain grounded and focused on the present moment rather than getting ahead of ourselves in our plans and desires. These words are attributed to David's son Solomon, whose story we find in 1 Kings 3. Solomon asked God for wisdom and discernment to help him lead the people of Israel. As you read these words of wisdom, what do you hear the writer telling those who are listening? More often than not it is the loudest person in the room who seems to get people's attention. Although, I have a hard time imagining Jesus being the loudest person in the room. His desire was not to garner our attention, nor did he seek fame. His focus was on those who were often left behind, they were not the fastest, or strongest, or those who held what they perceived as power. Jesus seemed to seek out those who left their lives open to the message of these words of Solomon... *"time and chance happen to them all... no one knows when their hour will come."* (NIV)

**Prayer:** God of wisdom and truth, help me this day to stay grounded by not getting ahead of myself. Help me to be attentive to what is going on around me, not merely those making the most noise, but where I am drawn to seek space to hear clearly and see deeply. Help me trust your love for me, knowing I do not have to compete for your attention, or receive what I truly need, even if I am not really sure what that is at the moment. Amen.

### **Thursday: James 3:13-4:6**

**Going Deeper:** The Letter of James has been accused of lacking a balance of grace in its call for disciplined lives. I do not agree with this sentiment. I see James' awareness of God's abundant grace in the verses of 4:5b-6a, *"Doesn't God long for our faithfulness in the life God has given us? But God gives us more grace."* (CEB) I also understand our actions speak much more loudly than our words. The focus of this teaching is to help us understand some of our internal wrestling, and to gain greater self-awareness in how to sow the seeds of God's wisdom which are made evident through showing mercy by treating others fairly and being kind and genuine. In other words, we are challenged to make evident our faith as the followers of the One who is our Messiah. I believe James 3:18 to be the defining words which capture James' message for us. In these verses: *"Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts."*

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, my Christ, help me align my life through your love and grace. Help me to sow the seeds of peace and justice in my heart, so when the struggles I wrestle with come I will have your balance of grace and encouragement to respond from a place of mercy, kindness, and authenticity. Help me to lift others up, and when I fall, help me have both the humility and courage to seek reconciliation and forgiveness. Lord Jesus, my Christ hear my prayer. Amen.

### **Friday: Isaiah 55:6-11**

**Going Deeper:** These words from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah are filled with comfort, inviting us to trust God is at work in our lives even when our plans go awry. They tell us God is present in all that happens, not as the cause, or as a form of punishment, but to reach us, and shape our understanding of God's intention and desire for all of us.

Isaiah calls out to all who will hear to understand the depth of God's mercy, as well as the richness of God's care. We often miss these truths about God because we fail to realize our plans are not God's plans. God sees beyond our individual lives to the community of humanity. God's wisdom and love seeks to help each of us find what we truly need rather than what we want or think we need. I encourage you to read the entire 55<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah before the end of the day and pay attention to what draws you to listen more deeply.

**Prayer:** Lord God who is wisdom and love, another week has past, and I am thankful you have been with me. I acknowledge your grace and mercy and my need. Now I ask for time to rest. I ask for your healing love to hold me, and your warm Spirit to comfort me as I trust my life and all I love into your care. Amen.