

First Fifteen: February 28 – March 4
Focus Scripture: Luke 4:1-13 (1st Sunday of Lent)

Monday: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Going Deeper: These words remind the people of God of the abundance of God's provision for their lives. If you continue reading beyond verse 10 through the end of the chapter they continue with a warning of the dangers of prosperity. The teaching within these verses seeks to make us aware of the temptations of our pride and our belief in our own self-sufficiency. They call us to trust the love of God, believing God knows our needs even better than we assume we do our selves. The foundational, although unspoken teaching of these verses in Deuteronomy 8, which we know as the Hebrew prayer Shema which grounded them in their faith and trust in God's provision. We will look at this prayer in more detail tomorrow, but for today let's dig a little deeper into how God's love although shared with abundant extravagance can feel as if we are being disciplined. I know for myself the lessons learned through humility are not easily embraced, and yet if we will let down our wounded pride, we may begin to see the wisdom in the lessons we are called to truly take to heart. When Jesus was tempted to provide for his physical needs, he chose this lesson from Deuteronomy 8:3 from his people's journey through the wilderness... *"we do not live on bread alone, our lives thrive when we trust the teaching of our God."* How do these words impact you? What do you hear teaching you? As we travel through the season of Lent, I encourage you to revisit Deuteronomy 8 and allow its message to sink below the surface of your understanding. As you do pay attention to verse 10. These words were used by Rabbi's to reinforce the message of this teaching, they were to be prayed after not before the meal... *"When you have eaten and you are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good he has given you."* (NIV) How might this change the way we understand and appreciate our blessings from God?

Prayer: Our God of gracious abundance, I thank you for all my blessings, as well as those places where I am being tested. Help me to see clearly your provision within these places and relationships and open my heart to receive your lessons not as discipline but as love. Amen.

Tuesday: Deuteronomy 6:4-12

Going Deeper: Is there something you do to get ready every morning for your day? Some routine that has become a habit that if missed feels like your day is starting on the wrong foot? Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is known as the Shema, it is a prayer that the People of God were to pray twice a day, morning, and evening. It was a reaffirmation of their relationship with God. It also helped ground and refocus them as they began and ended their day. The teaching of this passage calls for us to write these words upon our heart, to teach their meaning to our children, and to keep them top of mind throughout our day. Jesus used them to confront the temptation of fame, power, and privilege in Luke 4... in doing so he ground himself in his Father's love, rather than these vain achievements. I wonder if he might have had these words from Deuteronomy 6 in mind as he instructed his followers on the focus of his life and mission... *"I have come not to*

be served, but to serve others." (Matt. 20:28) Deuteronomy 6:10-12 caution us yet again to remember the source of our blessings, calling us to understand our lives are built upon the work of others who have gone before us. This is not meant to diminish our contributions and efforts; they are merely meant to call us to remember and be thankful... as well as embrace humility before God and others as a virtue just as Jesus also taught in Luke 14:7-11. (Take a moment to read this teaching from Jesus.) Humility which is at the core of our faith is not often valued in our society, making humility not only more difficult but also more important for us to understand it's meaning for our relationship with God and one another.

Prayer: Lord, help me seek humility, not self-debasement, but true humility understanding how gifted and blessed I am, and yet aware that these gifts and blessings are enhanced by others and given to me through your abundance of love for me. Amen.

Wednesday: I Corinthians 10:12-13

Going Deeper: You may have heard someone say when God closes a door a window will be opened. While this is a nice thought, and when we find ourselves behind that closed door the idea of an open window, or another opportunity to get what we want sure does sound good. But that is not what Paul is teaching in these verses. They are again words of caution, this time to those who think they are on the "right" side of things, meaning the moral high ground filled with righteous indignation. Paul is speaking to the "spiritually" proud in these verses who have cast judgment upon those who have fallen. He resets the playing field for all of us, telling us temptation or testing is common to all of us. Yes, there may be something that is a greater temptation for me than it is for you, but it appears Paul would say the reverse is also true. No matter where or how each one of us is tempted, the point is we all must face our temptations, and how will we do so. These verses may come to mind when we are in the grasp of situations that feel more like suffering rather than testing, wondering how could God think I can bear this? It is an honest question, and we must trust God is near and listening.... Always! Paul's point is not that our lives will be free of temptation, or as his wording implies in the original language, suffering. He tells us the object of suffering or temptation is how will we stand up against it... what is asked of us is to be steadfast in our faith, trusting God will give us the courage, or strength, or compassion, or whatever else is needed to remain faithful in our time of need.

Prayer: Lord of love, help me realize you are always near me, and that I am never alone in my struggles, sorrow, or temptation. Enlarge my faith and trust in you, that you will never let me bear my burden alone. Open my eyes to see those who you have called to surround me. Trusting your grace is always sufficient and your way will always lead me back into your arms of tender mercy. Amen.

Thursday: Psalm 91:1-2 & 14-16

Going Deeper: These words of the Psalmist call us to enter God's love as if we are entering into a place of safe haven, protection from the storms of life. They may give us

the false sense that if we are “faithful” as we understand it, God will keep us out of harms way. Read these words of the Psalm 91 from several translations. What do you hear? Our trust in God’s love, provision and presence is based upon God’s response... *“Because you are devoted to me, I’ll rescue you, I’ll protect you, because you know my name. Whenever you cry out to me, I’ll answer, I’ll be with you in troubling times, I’ll save you and glorify you.”* (Psalm 91:14-15 – CEB) The safe haven of God’s love is our awareness that God is faithful, present with us providing what we need to help us move through and beyond our suffering. The central message of our faith grounded within what we know as salvation does not spare us from suffering and hardship. If you question this look to the primary emblem of our faith, the Cross the place of God entering our human suffering through the suffering of God’s self through Jesus, God’s son. The promise of refuge is found in our trust in God’s love, our faith that God will hold us and carry us beyond our own crosses.

Prayer: Ever present and all loving God, you are my safe haven, my place of comfort within the storms, and yet Lord I need greater faith so I may rest in you through these rough places, as well as eyes of faith to help me stay focused, aware of and looking for the sunrise beyond the storm. Amen.

Friday: Hebrews 2:10-11 & 15-18

Going Deeper: What comes to mind when you hear the word perfect? Can you think of those things or places in your life that are or were perfect? Typically, to be perfect means to be without flaws. It might also mean nothing more needs to be added, something is perfect the way it is just as it is. How often do you think of people being perfect, and if you do what do you mean when you say someone is perfect just the way they are? The author of Hebrews wants us to know Jesus our Christ is the absolute clearest example of God’s grace. Through his life, ministry and death Jesus not only gave us the perfect example of God’s grace, he became God’s most perfect revelation of what grace asks of us. Look closely to Hebrews 2:10... *“It was appropriate for God, for whom and through whom everything exists, to use experiences of suffering to make perfect the pioneer of salvation. This salvation belongs to many sons and daughters whom he’s leading to glory.”* (CEB) What is the writer of Hebrew’s suggesting here? The word he uses which we translate as perfect is “teleios” which connotes wholeness or being complete. How was Jesus made perfect through his suffering? I believe he is telling us God’s understanding of being perfect is found through the grace we experience in surrendering our lives, our current struggles, and those places where we are tempted into the hands of God. Jesus the pioneer of our faith was made perfect through his suffering as he let go and surrendered his life into his Father’s love, trusting God would deliver him. This message becomes the bedrock of our understanding of grace. Deliverance does not necessarily mean by grace our suffering, and loss will be removed from us, but as we surrender our lives, loss, pain, and sorrow into God’s gracious love we will find our own resurrection in the midst of these places and struggles.

Prayer: Jesus my Savior and Lord, help me embrace the idea of surrender. Help me release my fears into God's love for me so I may fully enter into and experience God's grace. Help me trust God's gift of love found through surrendering my fears, and feelings of loss within my temptations and suffering. Lord of mercy, grace, and love... hear my prayer. Amen.