

First Fifteen: September 20-24
Scripture for Sunday September 26: Mark 9:38-50

Monday: Psalm 25:1-10

Going Deeper: Next year my graduating class from high school will have another class reunion. I found out recently from a classmate who I stay in touch with that my email is on the do not contact list and wondered why I had requested this: I told him I hadn't, and I had no idea why I was on the do not contact list. No wonder I have not heard about these gatherings throughout the years! It is interesting how quickly memories I had not even considered in decades came back to me from those days of my youth, especially those memories of awkward or embarrassing moments. The 25th Psalm, like the 51st is attributed to King David. Whereas the 51st is truly penitential, the 25th Psalm acknowledges our need for God's grace and mercy, but its cry is for God's teaching and guidance. The Psalmist clearly understands their life rests in God's love for them, while also recognizing our life is filled with pitfalls and moments where missteps have created unforeseen and now possibly embarrassing and shame producing memories. But still, they cry out in confidence knowing God's love is steadfast and if we stay the course our days, or day will be filled with peace, or as Jesus taught (Luke 3:5) *"the crooked will be made straight, and the rough places made smooth."* (CEB)

Prayer: God your ways are filled with peace and lead me into truth. Thank you for your guidance this day. Use the moments and events in this day to teach me more about your care for me, as well as those I will engage today. Help me follow the path you have set in my heart so I will stay close to you. Use me Lord of love and truth to lead and care for those I meet. Amen.

Tuesday: Numbers 11:4-7

Going Deeper: Do you remember the thermostats with the round dial? You turned it to the right to make it warmer and you turned it to the left to make it cooler. Pretty simply technology, that also serves as an interesting illustration for these verses in Numbers and the journey into freedom and away from captivity for the Hebrew people. As the heat was turned up, and by that, I mean challenging life events in the desert as a nomadic people... just like our busy lives today... they felt the heat and they began to grumble and remember the "good old days." Hard to believe they would choose slavery and oppressive labor for greater variety in their diet. Which was by the way according to the story bread from heaven provided by God. Unfortunately falling into this way of thinking and seeing is far too easy and quite possibly something we can all relate to. It happens when we lose sight of our blessings and God's provision for us as we feel the heat of our current situation. We seek relief by turning the dial back, recalling when the heat of the moment wasn't present. Although those memories are jaded because they are seen through a clouded lens based upon our current state of grumbling or unhappiness, causing us to discount our blessings and feel our only option is manna when in truth there is always so much more if we will trust God's love and leading.

Prayer: Open my eyes Lord to see the beauty in this day. Help me realize although there may be hard choices and difficult decisions that will stretch me, maybe even requiring more than I think I can take, if I keep my heart open and my faith steady you will provide me what I need. Help be to be thankful, knowing what you provide may not be what I want, believing your provision will always lead me closer to you and those I love. Amen.

Wednesday: Luke 12:13-21

Going Deeper: What does it mean to be *“rich toward God?”* Money and wealth and how we use it is a sensitive subject for most of us. But Jesus does not avoid it. He invites us to enter into the discussion, some might say he even challenges us to wrestle with our practice and understanding of wealth management. These words from Jesus captured by Luke are not a personal critique, but as a call to expand our awareness and to deepen our faith. Jesus challenges us to become more aware of the needs around us, to look and live beyond ourselves to discover what he means to be *“rich toward God.”* I hear in this teaching from Jesus a call to live more deeply by faith trusting God’s resources for my life so I may live more freely with the resources God’s gifts have allowed me to create evidenced in and through my abilities, health, and commitment to provide for my family. Again, I ask, what you hear in Jesus’ call to be *“rich toward God,”* and how do we balance our faith and his call to not *“hoard things for ourselves?”*

Prayer: Lord sometimes your words are hard to hear, not because they are hard to understand, but because we do hear their meaning. May your grace, love and mercy not only cover me today, but flow through me so I may look beyond what is happening in my little world to see what you are doing in the much larger world around me. I prayer that I will be open and ready to respond to your call, and I ask for your gentle but firm nudge to guide me. Amen.

Thursday: Luke 12:22-31

Going Deeper: The final line in this teaching from Jesus is a wonderful summation for the question of how to we discover what being rich toward God means. Seek first the kingdom of God in our daily activities, trusting as you do you will either find what you need, or discover you already had it. But what does this mean, to seek or make the practice of the kingdom of God a priority in our lives? I have changed the wording with intention because I suspect seeking the Kingdom is actualized by the practice of the values and teaching of our faith. Jesus’ call was to follow him, not merely believe in him or the truth of his message about God’s love. His desire was that the lives of his followers, our lives would be shaped and guided by his message and the witness of his life. In doing so he tells us we can live lives that would be less impacted by worry, and the competitive nature that pulls to keep up with trends and appearances. To seek first the kingdom of God is a call to live our lives on a deeper level where character, and compassion become our driving force rather than personal gain.

Prayer: I commit my life into your hands, my loving and compassionate God. There are times when the push and pull of my life run counter to your teaching. It is easy to simply follow the crowd, or just go with the flow rather than push back, resist, or suggest an alternative way. And

yet I do desire to live freer of worry, and less focused on external appearances. I do want to know the blessings of your love and the peace it brings, trusting you know my needs and either I have what I need already or you will provide them for me. Lord, my God of mercy I commit my life into your hands. Amen.

Friday: Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Going Deeper: These words of wisdom from Ecclesiastes remind us of not only are need for companionship, but also the benefit of a friend, our co-workers, our spouse, or family. They remind us that life lived to its fullest includes others, who are there to share the high as well as low moments. The phrase found in Ecclesiastes 4:12... "*A three-ply cord doesn't easily snap*" (CEB) is intriguing to me. The assumption I suspect most of us make is that the writer refers to the Spirit of God as the third strain, and this could very well be the meaning. I find comfort in this understanding, and yet also see its potential to mean something else, possibly the community of faith, or the gathering of a small group, or some other form of supportive community. This idea is similar to the notion of the "12th man" in reference to the crowd at a home game. Either way, it is comforting to know we are not alone, and that is God's desire for us all.

Prayer: As this week comes to an end, I thank you my Lord and God. I thank you for the challenges, I thank you for the blessings and I pray that the work that is left undone will be kept safe until I can pick it back up again. I ask for time to rest this weekend, and I pray that I you will help me to be attentive to your presence as the third strand holding my life and those I love within your gentle, but strong hands. Amen.