

1st Fifteen - August 23-27

Monday: Deuteronomy 4:1-8

Going Deeper: I have often wondered over the past few years if we don't make our lives harder than they need to be. I remember, now about 25 years ago, Robert Fulghum released his book "All I Really Need to Know I Learned In Kindergarten." He suggested life's most important lessons were learned in the sandbox rather than in graduate school. He was not talking about knowledge, but the basics of how to live well. That is also the message of these verses from Deuteronomy. Moses instructs the Hebrew people to remember and abide by the law and lessons that God had given them. He is referring to the Ten Commandments, and he tells them if you take these to heart and abide by them you will live well and find what you need. He later in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 grounds these laws of God in what is we know as "the great commandment" – *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."* (NIV) He instructs the Hebrew people to neither add nor subtract from these words that God has given them and therein often lies our problem. If we could find a way, or is it the will, to simply follow these basic guidelines how much better would our lives and world be?

Prayer: Lord God, you are one. You are wisdom, love, and mercy. Help me this day to live well by living simply. Help me to keep in my mind and my heart focused on these basic, and yet foundational truths and rules for living. Help me to see the needs of others in relationship to my own. Help me to live into who you both created and call me to be as your child; one who seeks to love you with all my heart, soul, and strength this day. Help me not make life more complicated as I seek to find the common connection between your love and how I share it in all I do throughout my day. Amen.

Tuesday: Psalm 15

Going Deeper: This Psalm of David spells out how to practice the Commandments Moses called his people to adhere to as they entered the "promised land." They reveal how and where to use those basic guidelines for living well and how they lead us into a life that is less stressful and one that leads to inner peace. I encourage to read this short Psalm several times slowly, seeking clarity and awareness how each of these short phrases of encouragement touch upon nearly every aspect of our daily interactions with others. These words tell us as we practice their message we will never stumble, and by this I believe the meaning is we will never find ourselves in a place of compromise or embarrassment. Take them to heart throughout your day and see where they lead you!

Prayer: As this day begins, help me keep these truths of love and care for the other front and center in my mind and heart, so I will know your peace. God of love and mercy, give me patience with myself, as well as others when our lives collide and touch one another. These engagements have caught me off guard before, but on this day help me to use these words to guide my responses. Give me grace if and when I fail and give me courage to keep trying no matter the response of the other. Amen.

Wednesday: Matthew 6:25-34

Going Deeper: An old hog farmer named Ralph told me when I was fresh out of seminary, “Don’t go stirring up trouble for yourself. Trouble always has a way of stirring itself up!” At the time I am sure I doubted the wisdom of his words, but now I know they were true. This teaching from Jesus is part of what is known as “the sermon on the mount” in Matthew. These verses begin with Jesus telling his followers not to worry and they end with his clarifying teaching, don’t worry about tomorrow, there is more than enough to go around today!” The truth is I suspect worry is baked into our DNA. Some of us worry more than others, all of us understand and have experienced worry in our lives. What Jesus seems to want us to realize about worry is he that he understands we do in fact have worries while redirecting our worried thoughts toward “our heavenly Father” who knows our needs. God’s love for us is not in question. Instead, he tells us when you are worried focus on God’s blessings and provisions and begin to live into our faith.

Prayer: *(If you prefer you may choose to begin this prayer, our heavenly Parent, God is truly more expansive and inclusive than I am sure we can imagine.)* Our Father, help me notice the birds and flowers and life that goes on all around me. Open my eyes to see them as an extension of this lesson teaching me how you provide for all whom you love and care for. Open my mind to allow you to still my worry within this day by seeing all the life that surrounds me. Help me to trust I am seen by your watchful eye. Help me, my God of great abundance to know even in the trouble of this day by staying faithful to your teaching and care for myself and others I will find the way. Amen.

Thursday: Matthew 5:13-20

Going Deeper: Our reading today is again taken from Jesus’ sermon on the mount in Matthew. His declaration that you and I are the salt of the earth and the light of the world unfortunately come with a fair amount of baggage. Salt and light are familiar words, most likely you have heard numerous sermons about being salt and light for others. But when you read them alongside Jesus’ teaching about the longevity and durability of the Law it sheds a fresh understanding on them, especially considering Jesus’ comment, “*unless your righteousness is greater than that of the religious leaders and teachers.*” What is it that Jesus wanted his followers to hear? I suspect the key might be found in verse 18 where Jesus affirms the truth and practice of the teachings of the Law rather than its imposition of who is right with God and who is on the outside looking in. Being light and salt, like following the essence of the Law is about application and practice rather than a personal morality code, where a change of heart creates changes in attitudes and choices.

Prayer: Lord of light and love, help me to be salt and light for those around me today. Help me be attentive to how my words and actions can either lift others up or tear them down. Help me choose my words carefully. Through your grace guide my reactions through the lens of your law given to humanity so long ago, and then lived out in the message and life of Jesus. My God and my Savior help me to trust your grace is present in how I conduct myself and that is what

you seek, helping others to experience and find your love for themselves in my responses and care for them. Amen.

Friday: Micah 6:6-8

Going Deeper: These verses in Micah are in my top ten most cherished in the Bible. I find myself coming back to them for inspiration, as well as comfort. They remind me it is not always the method that matters, but the outcome. They tell me although I may miss the mark, which for some means I have failed, if I am willing, I can learn from my mistakes, humbly accepting what was indeed mine to accept. If I can, then love and truth will ultimately prevail. God's desire is not that we become perfect, but we grow in being better and more capable in sharing love and compassion with others; allowing for each of us to have our turn at the table of God's abundance. These words remind me life is not about performance, life is about discovery in the journey where we find ourselves, and the God who loves us in the lessons that teach us humility, courage, and compassion.

Prayer: Another week has past, and you my God have been by my side even when I was not aware, or even thinking about you. Your grace sustained me and when I wandered it called me back to you. Thank you, Lord. Help me rest from this week and its activities and its challenges. Help me lay them down for now knowing they can be picked back up later, and you will be with me when I do. Lead me in this day so I may finish well. Amen.