

**First Fifteen: January 31-February 4**  
**Focus Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

**Monday: Romans 5:1-5**

**Going Deeper:** The opening sentence of Romans 5 lays a foundational truth for us and our faith... *"we have peace* (shalom – can mean peace, as well as integrity, and wholeness) *with God.*" This shalom/peace is ours because of God's desire to love us and be in relationship with us. This peace/wholeness is ours through our faith in God revealed in and through the teaching and ministry of Jesus our Christ. This shalom/peace steadies us during hardship and doubt, and as Paul teaches us in Romans 5:3 *"We even take pride in our problems, because we know trouble produces character, and character produces hope."* (CEB) The actual word Paul uses in this verse is suffering. Now suffering is not something we seek out, and yet we all know the expressions about suffering and struggle as an opportunity to help us grow stronger and more resilient. But Paul sees hope not merely as an aspect of our courage and character, but as a gift grounded in the outpouring of God's love through the presence of the Holy Spirit (literally God's presence with us). Take a moment and consider your feelings of hopefulness. Where are they typically grounded or what are they normally based on? How might this teaching from Paul enrich and fortify your understanding and experience of hope?

**Prayer:** God of wonder and mercy.... You are my foundation of peace and hope. Help me to rest in your love today, aware of your presence with me in all that happens. Help me embrace the challenges of this day from a perspective of hope, knowing you will guide me through whatever comes my way. Amen.

**Tuesday: Romans 5:6-11**

**Going Deeper:** God's love for us is so deep, so strong, so pervasive... meaning even when we don't think we need it or show any particular desire to return it, God continues to love us and seek connection with us! This is true throughout our lives even as our faith ebbs and wanes through the twists and turns our lives take. Paul is telling us God is the initiator, God is the protagonist and that our response is simply to embrace the truth of God's love for us! The peace of God, the shalom which creates a sense of being made right or being made whole is only the beginning according to Paul in these verses. *"If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life?"* (Romans 5:10 -CEB) Paul is referring to Jesus' life, as well as ours beyond the resurrection. When does this resurrection life begin? I suspect most of us think of this as life after death, but these words from Paul seem to tell us this new life begins now! Take a moment and consider how God's love for you has changed your life and perspective. Now consider where you still hold onto old patterns, ideas and perspectives that could be changed if you would trust God's grace to make all things new... including you and me.

**Prayer:** You my God bring resurrection and new life into all of your creation, including me. I see it in the rhythm of the seasons. Now help me understand it for my own life. Help me see it in the people around me, help me to trust it in the movement and changes in my life. You love and care for me hold me even when my fears rattle my faith. Lord of life... hear my prayer. Amen.

### **Wednesday: Romans 6:1-5**

**Going Deeper:** As a teenager I think I may have used these words from Paul to “sin boldly!” Who am I kidding I suspect we all can acknowledge there have been moments when we choose the path “of sin” simply because we wanted to, and we felt confident in God’s grace to forgive our sin! But in doing so now, hopefully we understand this is an immature response, understanding and relationship with God’s grace. In these few verses Paul teaches us the deeper meaning and significance of our baptism. Baptism is far more than a liturgy or ceremony we witness. In baptism Paul tells us we both die and then rise with Christ. This is why our Baptismal Liturgy includes these words “We are incorporated into God’s mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and Spirit.” (UMC Hymnal page 33) Paul then pushes us to understand through our faith and connection to God’s love we can begin to walk in what he calls “*newness of life.*” (Romans 6:4 – CEB) Or as he puts it in the next verse (Romans 6:5)... “*united together in a resurrection like his.*” We may think of our faith’s impact upon us as what takes place after we die, but for Paul and in truth for all of us, the impact takes place immediately and is ongoing as our lives are transformed by God’s love and our growing understanding and connection to God in our daily lives.

**Prayer:** My God, your love is more than I can understand, and yet through your love I am called into a life of faith where I begin to live in a new way. Truthfully Lord, I often don’t feel any different, and sometimes get caught up in patterns of behavior and responses to others that are not new at all. Help me trust the work you are doing within and for me through my faith in your love and the promise of my baptism... knowing this is a lifelong journey we travel together. Amen.

### **Thursday: Romans 6:6-11**

**Going Deeper:** There are some who have believed Paul thought our body was the locus or source of our “sinful behavior.” I do not believe this was his intention at all; I believe Paul was speaking metaphorically to help create an awareness that by grace we are freed from a fear of death, and the consequences of our sin. But this is merely the tip of the iceberg as they say! Paul was speaking about a transformational gift that the awareness of grace brings us... we can make different choices, we can begin to live lives that speak truth into fear and bring light into darkness. Paul also understands sin differently that most of us do at this point in history. Sin is not behavioral missteps, nor is sin merely an immoral act. Sin for Paul is rebellion against the Lord of Creation. Sin is a brokenness within us caused by a lack of love... the acceptance of God’s love for us and our own self-love which guides us to live our lives connected to the world around us. I suspect in the mind of Paul, sin was isolation from all that was God centered or

God focused, meaning a life of self-centered idolized disconnection. I really like the way the Message captures this... *"From now on, think of it this way: Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you; God speaks your mother tongue..."* (The MSG Romans 6:9) In other words... Living into or sharing in Christ's resurrection we are given a new way to see and live our lives. Brokenness and disconnection no longer define or guide us. We listen to God's voice of love and encouragement now.

**Prayer:** God open my mind and thoughts to receive your messages and encouragement today. Help me to listen from my heart, from my faith in your loving gaze upon me and your enduring presence with me. Help me to then seek ways to bring light, hope and compassion into this day and all its moments... knowing I am forgiven, and your grace and Spirit will guide me. Amen.

**Friday: Romans 6:12-14**

**Going Deeper:** In these verses Paul is speaking metaphorically when he tells us do not allow or offer parts of our body to sin as a weapon to do wrong. (Romans 6:13 – CEB) I heard an addiction counselor put it this way. Don't let stinking thinking control your choices! I believe Paul understood, real change is hard, and it requires a renewal of the way we think about ourselves and others (See Romans 12: 1&2). If you are like me, you have daily routines. We get up and do the same thing nearly every day. We may even eat the same thing for breakfast! So, when someone suggests we try something new we resist... why change something that still works? What our faith asks of us, through our connection to God's love and our growing awareness of who we are, to allow it to challenge us to live our lives so our faith becomes evident in all we do! So, if this is true... does what we have always done still really speak to who we are becoming?

**Prayer:** Lord, you know I love my routines, help me see where they have become ruts that hinder my growth into the fullness of who are calling me to become. My God of grace, renewal and all that thrives, help me trust the rhythm of your love which often leads us into places where we must let something die so new life can come. Amen.