

We First Fifteen: February 14-18
Focus Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:35-36 & 42-50

Monday: Romans 8:1-4

Going Deeper: These verses in Romans 8 seek to help us understand our relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. They are grounded in Paul's profound understanding and experience of God's love, mercy, and grace. His story is found in Acts 9, where he encountered the "Risen Christ" who quite literally opened his eyes of understanding to God's intention and desire to create the path of restoration with God and within ourselves, and others. The battle ground as Paul seeks to explain is within what has been described as our "flesh" which is the literal translation of the word used by Paul. Although this word has also been translated as our "sinful nature," or simply as our "selfishness." What Paul seems to be talking about is our self-centered and self-focused and driven desire for prove we are loveable and worthy. Another word for this is our Ego, which is the self-protective devise we use to avoid being hurt, disappointed, and abandoned... even though much of its function actually pushes us to excel. Paul's teaching about the Law, refers to seeking God's approval though moral success, and achievement, which was his own path until he met the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Now he encourages us to live boldly, knowing we are loved and accepted not through what he calls the law of sin and death, but through our faith in the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which sets us free from fear and death knowing we have God's approval as God's beloved children.

Prayer: Dear God, my Lord of love and mercy, open my eyes to see where I hold onto to fear... fear of failure, fear of disapproval, fear of any kind. Help me to allow your love through the Spirit of life, your Holy Spirit to wash over me. I choose to live with confident hope you will use me and guide me as your child and Jesus' disciple. Amen.

Tuesday: Romans 8:5-8

Going Deeper: I read several different translations of these verses, and the Message in my mind most clearly captures what I consider to be Paul's intent... *"Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them – (the) living and breathing God."* (Romans 8:5 – The Message) In an effort to make this as clear as possible... I would say Paul is telling us God's desire for us is to move beyond ourselves, to get out of our own head where all we think about is what we want and need so we can begin to see the beauty and wonder going on all around us. But I will add... in doing so we will also see the needs of others; we will see how our self-focused choices have had negative consequences for others. Hopefully unintended. When we live selfishly, we choose a path that Paul tells us is a dead end, but when we live freely trusting God's love, believing God's grace will always lead us to what we need then we will find ourselves living more spacious invitational lives that create community, sharing hope and healing for others, as well as ourselves.

Prayer: My God of abundance help me release my needs, wants and desires into your loving care. I want to live within your spacious grace. I want to live a life that is invitational rather than cautious and exclusionary. I want to learn to follow your lead and respond to your direction. I want to learn how to live life lead by your Spirit. Amen.

Wednesday: Romans 8:9-11

Going Deeper: Paul continues his teaching about living our lives guided by our faith. He tells us our lives through our faith are now in the hands of God, surrounded by God's Spirit and love. Where we discover the tension in this new way of living is what Paul defines as our sinful nature, sometimes translated as our "flesh" which simply refers to a self-centered ego driven lifestyle that seeks to fulfill our individual needs not merely instead of, but sometimes at the expense of the communal needs of others. He tells us you are done with that old dead way of living, while at the same time acknowledging we still feel its push and pull within us... *"But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells - even though you still experience all the limitations of sin - you yourself experience life on God's terms."* (Romans 8:10 – The Message) He assures us that by faith, the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is within us and will give us what we need as we struggle to be free of our selfish ego driven desires. Where this is actualized within us is through our faith in God's love and provision for us. Trusting God will always give us, or lead us to what we need, knowing that God's way for us is not always the easy way, and in fact more often than not calls us to let go of our hold on life and its outcomes as we go deeper into our trusting faith in God's love. I encourage you to read Romans 8:11 and keep this one verse before you throughout your day. Read several different translations... Listen to what Paul is trying to tell us and ask the Holy Spirit to help you clearly hear God's message for you within these words. *"When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christs!"* (Romans 8:11 – The Message)

Prayer: Loving God, may your grace sustain me today. As I feel the inner movement of my struggle with my wants and your desire for me, help me remember your Spirit lives in me and will give me what I need to live faithfully and graciously. Amen.

Thursday: Romans 8:12-17

Going Deeper: In these words, I hear Paul telling us it is time to put our words into action! Trust what God has done and continues to do within and for you! I believe the Message captures this for us... *"God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike 'What's next, Papa?' God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children."* (Romans 8:14-16) The foundational question in these verses is... do we really know and trust who we are by and through God's love and grace? This is our truth, and yet it has not always been our truth and for many of us, even if we grew up in the church, we are still very much aware of how and where we

come up short. Paul tells us this does not diminish our truth or God's grace! As I understand it, this growing awareness within us becomes our resurrection truth that begins the moment we embrace our faith and breathe in the grace and mercy of God. Filling our lungs, our heart, and our spirit with a corrective view of ourselves and our world. Then from this place of faith in God and trust in God's truth for us we begin to live the life we were both called to and created for as God's children.

Prayer: God of love and mercy, help me trust not only your love, but also fully believe and trust who you say I am as your child. Lord of love, the time is now, help me embrace the challenges of this day knowing you have called me into action for you... and in doing so I know you are with me always and everywhere. Amen.

Friday: Romans 8:24-29

Going Deeper: *"For in this hope we were saved."* (Romans 8:24a – NIV) What is hope and what is the outcome of our hope? I suspect most of the things you and I hope for are not exactly what Paul is referring to in this teaching. Hope is often based upon our desired outcomes, what we want to happen. We may have good reasons and intentions for what we hope for... but hope as a theological device or means is not based upon our desired future outcome, instead hope is the grounding of our faith in God's goodness. Through our faith hope becomes more than an emotion or feeling. Because of our faith hope becomes a way of life, that trusts God's movement no matter the outcome. Hope allows us to see beyond our present circumstances realizing these momentary challenges are used by God to help us, shaping who we are becoming and helping us realize grace is intricately woven into the tapestry of our lives. Romans 8:28 teaches us... *"We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to God's purpose."* (CEB) These often-quoted words from Paul speak deeply into the meaning, and transformative work of hope in our lives. They are not a child-like cry of desperation asking God to give us what we want, but rather a deep trust in God's love for us within every moment of our lives.

Prayer: God you are the ground of my hope. I want to believe this, and yet I also need to be honest. I sometimes place my longing on people, things, and outcomes more so than your abiding love for me. Forgive me... and help me dig deeper and know hope that lasts comes to me from within my faith in you. Amen.