

**First Fifteen: May 16-20**  
**Focus Scripture: John 14:23-29**

**Monday: John 15:1-11**

**Going Deeper:** The image of the vine Jesus uses in this teaching has roots from the prophetic teaching found in Isaiah 5:1-7; although those who were aware of this teaching from Isaiah heard something much more clearly in Jesus' words... hope, restoration, and grace. Jesus uses this image to help us understand our need stay connected to him and his teachings. Through our connection, consideration, and study of his teachings, we will find joy, fulfillment, meaning and purpose for our lives. As I looked at the various translations of John 15, I found the Message to be the most helpful. *"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do you. In the same way a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined to me."* (John 15:4 – the MSG) Make your home in me as I do in you... I find these words deeply comforting. They speak of a lasting and life-giving connection... Another way to think of our need for connection might be from the phrase practice makes perfect, but even this does not fully capture its meaning. Jesus is saying not merely to practice our faith, but to do so in community, connected to others in the body of Christ or the church. The vine has many branches, all of which are sustained and developed through it. The image of a vine and branches reminds us that our joy, even life itself is incomplete outside of the sharing of love with others through the love we have found in God.

**Prayer:** "SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD, be the Gardener of my soul. For so long I have been waiting, silent and still – experiencing a winter of the soul. But now, in the strong name of Jesus Christ, I dare to ask: Clear away the dead growth of the past, break up the hard clods of custom and routine, stir in the rich compost of vision and challenge, bury deep in my soul the implanted Word, cultivate and water and tend my heart, until new life buds and opens and flowers. Amen (This prayer is from Richard Foster's [Prayers from the Heart](#))

**Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 13:11-13**

**Going Deeper:** What are the foundations of your life? Where is your greatest treasure buried? What sustains you through hard times and brings you delight in moments of joy and celebration? Throughout our lives how we answer these questions differs. As we grow and experience life... its highs as well as its lows... what we need, what we cherish, and what we understand as essential change. These words from the Apostle Paul remind us of this truth. They also offer a powerful message of hope... *"Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face to face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known."* (1 Cor. 13:12 – CEB) Paul is speaking about intimacy, closeness, and the connection that make our lives full and rich with meaning and joy no matter what the season! His words are not referring to something after our lives are over, he is sharing what is possible here and now through our faith and focus on what God is doing and how God has invited you and me... us to join with God through following Jesus. I encourage you to read the complete

13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians. We typically associate these words with weddings, and yet I suspect Paul's intent was for them to be guidelines for living day to day, growing in our faith, becoming more aware of, and connected to God's leading and presence through the Spirit which is with us and within us always and everywhere.

**Prayer:** *"Now faith, hope and love remain – these three things – and the greatest of these is love."* Lord of love, creator of life and all that bring joy and abundance I open my heart and my life to you. Fill me, lead me, use me to spread these things, these truths, these gifts that remain and call us to find the one thing that matters. Amen.

### **Wednesday: James 1:19-27**

**Going Deeper:** James encourages us to be "doers and not merely hearers" of Jesus' words of instruction. James' instruction to listen before we speak and to keep our anger and frustration at bay will go a long way to helping us become bettering at "doing" what we believe than merely telling others what we believe. I like the way the Message rendered James' teaching in chapter 1:19, *"God's righteousness does not grow from human anger. Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear!"* I have been told all my life, if you want to learn how to do something start doing it... put it into practice, use what you have learned, and it will grow and become part of who you are and in time it may even become second nature for us. James shares this encouragement not out of fear of or before God, but simply to help us become the people of faith God desires, giving us a richer, fuller life rather than becoming those who are merely religious. This comparison while sounding somewhat harsh simply follows the image of looking at our reflection, then not being able to recall what we look like and more importantly who we are and what we value based upon our faith and trust in God's lovingkindness.

**Prayer:** Saying and doing are not the same Lord. I understand this and yet I must confess there are times when my words do not match my faith or my desire for who I want to become. Help me be the one in any crowd, or with whomever I find myself... your faithful servant who seeks to embody my faith and your love. Amen.

### **Thursday: 1 John 3:18-24**

**Going Deeper:** *"The mouths of the righteous recite wisdom; their tongues discuss justice. The Instruction of their God is in their hearts; they don't miss a step."* (Psalm 37:30-31 – CEB) Rabbinic teaching understood the human heart as the seat or place within us holding and guiding our emotional as well as intellectual inner life. The heart was seen as the fountain from which our thoughts, and actions flow out into the world around us. We often refer to our heart as the foundational center of our lives and when we really mean something we may even use the phrase "with my whole heart." I suspect there are many who still view the heart as our inner moral compass, evidenced by the expression "simply follow your heart." What both the Psalmist in this 37<sup>th</sup> Psalm, and

John are saying is when we live our lives with authenticity seeking to follow the guidance of God's and Jesus' directive to love then our hearts will be at peace, clear and free of fear and doubt. John Wesley described this as a feeling of assurance, trusting God's love, grace, and mercy, which lead to having an inner confidence that God was near and guiding us. But what does this mean for us today and how are we to understand this teaching... the rule I use is guided by the question "Is something life giving, does it encourage and build up, drawing our focus toward community or is it life draining stealing our energy, time and focus away from compassion for others and self?"

**Prayer:** Lord of light, joy and wondrous love... *"Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me! Return the joy of your salvation to me and sustain me with a willing spirit."* Amen. (Psalm 51:10 & 12 – CEB)

**Friday: Colossians 3:1-14**

**Going Deeper:** Paul is describing what some have called the "Centrality of Christ," meaning the teachings, life, and behaviors of this one whom we call Savior are to become the foundational guide for all we do. You may remember the acronym WWJD. It was a reminder to ask yourself "What would Jesus do?" as you faced not only the difficult decisions of life, but the everyday mundane ones as well. Paul is essentially challenging us to understand how the practice of our faith impacts our lives forever more. Again, the Message's rendering of Paul's wording is quite clear, *"So if you are serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides."* (Colossians 3:1 – The MSG) Although Paul does not use the word "resurrection life" that is exactly what he is talking about, the impact of Jesus' resurrection upon us, how it reshapes not merely our self-understanding before God, but extends out into how we engage everything else in our lives! Paul spells this out clearly in Colossians 3:12-14. It does not matter which translation you use; its meaning remains the same... Paul challenges us to take on the character and nature of the One we say we now follow. His compassion and kindness for those who are different. His tender mercy for those who are unseen and left behind. His grace evidenced by his patient forgiving manner with those who had wronged him, and his undying love for God and others. The words of Colossians 3:14 have long been words I go back to again and again. In fact this letter from Paul continues to be something I read regularly so I can dig deeper into its call upon my life as a follower of Jesus... *"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together."* (Col. 3:14-NIV). Not only does love bind these virtues and nature of Christ within our character, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the love of God is also bound within our heart as well as we seek to follow this path to which we are called.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, my risen Christ... guide me, lift me, open my eyes and heart so I may learn to rest in your love and seek to lean on your strength. Deepen my faith in the power of love and enlarge my trust that your presence is always near. Amen.