

Growing Deeper
Guideposts – Part Two

Week Four - Trinity
John 14:15-31

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. What do you think is the most important attribute of our God? What adjective would you use to describe Him?
2. If you had asked a Jew this question, he or she would have almost inevitably pointed to Deuteronomy 6:4. Turn to this passage and read it. What does it list as God's most important attribute?
3. How is this different from the kind of answer most Christians would give?
4. Now read John 16:12-15 and 17:1-5. How would Jesus' words sound to a Jew who embraced Deuteronomy 6:4?
5. How would you explain to a Jewish person why our "Trinity" of God is the same as their "God is One" God?
6. How important is the concept of the Trinity to our faith? Could someone not believe in this understanding of God and still be a Christian? Explain your answer.
7. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, use these words as your prayer: "God, we live in a world that values power and performance. And God, You are the most powerful. But your ways are not like our ways. Above all else, you are loving. It is so easy for me to lose sight of that. Please help me to put relationships first and to love others because You love me. Amen."

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Our God is a God of Love and a God of Power. Which of these two traits would you say is more essential to who God is? Why?
9. Timothy Keller has this to say about the triune nature of God: "If God is unipersonal, then until God created other beings there was no love, since love is something that one person has for another. This means that a unipersonal God [would have] power, sovereignty, and greatness from all eternity, but not love. Love then is not of the essence of God, nor is it at the heart of the universe. Power is primary." What key difference does it make about God that He is a multi-personal trinity?
10. Now read John 14:15-31. What words does Jesus use to describe the relationships between the Father, the Spirit and Jesus himself?

11. If God already had a loving relationship within himself (the three persons), why then did He need to make human beings?
12. The early American preacher Jonathan Edwards gave this answer to the question: “Why would such an infinitely good, perfect, and eternal being create? The ultimate reason that God creates is not to remedy some lack in God, but to extend that perfect internal communication of the triune God’s goodness and love.” Did God make us in order to have power over us or in order to love us?
13. How might this understanding change your own attitude toward your relationship with God?
14. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, use these words as your prayer: “God, there are times when I lose sight of how much You love me. I forget that You didn't create me just to follow a list of rules, but to enjoy a relationship with You. You don't want merely my obedience, You want my heart. Thank you for gently reminding me every day of how You love me. Amen. “

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. God continues to reveal Himself to us in specific ways. As you think about God the Father, what things do you know about Him?
16. The Washington Post asked a group of children to share what they know about God. You can watch the short clip here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm0we7FgM7U> How well do you think these children know God the Father?
17. Let’s get to know the Father as He reveals Himself to us in his Word. How, personally, was He involved in your birth? (See Psalm 139:13 and Jeremiah 1:5)
18. What does God do take care of us? (See Psalm 145:15-16 and 1 Peter 5:7)
19. Why does God take care of us? (See Genesis 32:10 and Psalm 103:13)
20. How can we respond to the love of God our Father? (See Psalm 118:1 and Genesis 2:15)
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, using these words as your prayer: “God, You are the god of details. You can be found in all of the details of our lives. Sometimes we are tempted to believe that You don't care about the small things, but You care about everything! Thank You for caring for me so much. When I grasp how intimately You know and care for me, it fills me with love to share with others. Amen.”

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Let's talk about the second person of the Trinity: Jesus. Read Isaiah 53:4-5. Why was it worth it to God to become a man who would be tortured and killed?

23. Which means more to you personally: God, the Father, who loved you enough to create you or God, the Son, who loved you enough to rescue you? Explain your answer.

24. Now read John 1:29 and Hebrews 2:14-17. From what did Christ's sacrifice rescue us?

25. In what ways do these three things no longer have power over you?

26. Now read Matthew 25:31-32. To what future work of Christ do we look forward?

27. Why can you be confident to stand before Christ when He returns?

28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, using these words as your prayer: "God, You are not only our father but also our rescuer. You would stop at nothing to rescue me from my sin. Thank You so much for sending Jesus to model mercy and love in action. Thank You for taking away the barrier in our relationship when you sent Jesus to the cross. And thank You for empowering me to share this good news with the world around me. Amen."

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays in your life?

30. Think back on the moment when you became a believer or first took your faith seriously. Was it a more intellectual or emotional choice?

31. Was it really your choice at all? Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-16. What does it take to understand God's truths or to accept God?

32. Which is more accurate to say: God chose you or you chose God?

33. Which person of the Trinity actively changed your heart so that you could begin to understand and accept God?

34. Look at one important promise of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:9. What power is now available to you, each and every

moment of every day? What difference can that make in your life?

35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, using these words as your prayer: “God, it is amazing to think that the very same spirit that lived in Jesus now lives and works in me! You are with me every moment of the day, ready to give me peace, patience, joy, and all of the fruits of the Spirit. Help me to lean on You in times of trouble, knowing that You are always ready to help. Amen.”

Week FIVE: Communion

Matthew 26:17-30

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Take a quick inventory of your current life situation. What is the most important meal you share annually? Is it Thanksgiving, an annual reunion-potluck with extended family, Christmas-eve at grandma's house, Mother's Day? What makes that meal so special?
2. In a bedside drawer, I have a pocket knife my father always carried (I own much nicer ones). I also have his UAW shop steward jacket from International Harvester (which doesn't even fit me). Why do we keep mementos of those we loved who died years ago?
3. What is the ultimate point of remembering people, events and experiences?
4. Jesus told us to celebrate Holy Communion in remembrance of Him. What do you suppose Jesus meant by that?
5. Read Matthew 26:17-30. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He was gathered with His disciples for a specific reason. What was it? Why did they do it?
6. Jesus never opposed tradition; He only opposed traditions that were no longer meaningful in the lives of people. Read Matthew 15:8-9. What was Jesus so upset about?
7. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, pray a prayer of thanksgiving for those memories that still serve a good purpose in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. How much do you know about the Jewish celebration of the Passover? Read Exodus 12. What did that special meal commemorate?
9. Certain foods were required for the celebration of the Passover: unleavened bread, wine, a boiled egg, salt water, bitter greens & herbs and lamb. What is the significance of each item in this annual celebration?
10. What comparisons can you make between the Passover and the celebration of the Lord's Supper?
11. A traditional Jewish celebration of the Passover involves a young child who asks specific questions to an older family member during the course of the meal. Do you know any of those questions? What is the value of that tradition?

12. In your church's celebration of the Lord's Supper, what is done to prepare the people for participation? Why?
13. Does your church require instruction of participants before receiving the Lord's Supper? Why would that be a good idea based on the celebration of the Passover?
14. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray a prayer of gratitude for the wisdom of God who provided and then commanded the regular celebration of this special remembrance.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Read Matthew 26:17-30. What verse seemed most meaningful to you? Why?
16. Look again at verse 18. Do you think that man felt that it was an imposition for Jesus to request a place to celebrate the Passover? Explain the concept of blessing people by asking them to provide assistance for an important cause. Why are we often so hesitant to ask people to make a sacrifice for an important cause?
17. Read verses 20-25 regarding Jesus' predication of betrayal. Why do you think Jesus spoke of it in advance? How did it benefit the other disciples? What purpose did it serve in the mind of Judas?
18. Do you think Judas was just an opportunist who never believed Jesus' enemies could do Him any harm, or do you think he expected Jesus' ultimate trial and crucifixion? Guards and mobs had previously tried to harm Jesus, to no avail. How might that have affected Judas' thinking?
19. Read Matthew 27:1-10. What does this suggest about Judas' act of betrayal?
20. Was Jesus arrested against His will? If He knew in advance how this night would end, why did He not resist His captors?
21. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for peace of heart for all the times you have betrayed your faith in Jesus. Pray for those who are overcome with guilt and shame for something they have done which still haunts them to this day.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Judas betrayed Jesus the night he was arrested. Peter also denied Jesus, not once, but three times. What's the difference between what became of Judas and what became of Peter?
23. Read John 21:15-22. Why is this story an important follow-up to the story of Peter's betrayal the night of Jesus' arrest?

24. Read the closing verses of our assigned lesson, Matthew 26:26-30.

25. What did Jesus call the unleavened bread? What did He call the cup of wine?

26. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16. If it were not for this verse, we might assume Jesus meant the bread and wine only represent His body and His blood. In Matthew 26:28, what reason does Jesus give for sharing in the Lord's Supper. Martin Luther once said, "And where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation." What are the benefits of sharing in the Lord's supper?

27. Read John 6:47-69. Did Jesus try to make it easier for people to accept his body and blood as true food by saying it was only symbolic? What final reason does Peter provide for taking Jesus at His word (without a need to understand or even agree)? See John 6:68,69. Is that enough for you?

28. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, pray for faith to trust the teachings of Scripture without a need to always understand or make the truth of God reasonable, as humans define reason.

Spend FIFTEEN: Day Five

29. Lutherans like to describe the "real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper," through the phrase, "in, with and under." In other words, they don't define how or when the real presence occurs, but just accept that it is present and through participation in the sacrament it is received by the participant. In your opinion, what makes the wine and bread into the sacrament and not simple bread and wine? Is it the prayer of the pastor? How close he stands to the elements? Is it the words of institution he recites from the Bible? Is it the faith of the participant?

30. Do the elements of bread and wine transform forever into the body and blood or do they remain present? Read 1 Corinthians 11:26-27 for insight. What does Paul say we eat?

31. On the other hand, what does Paul say we abuse (in those same two verses) if we participate without faith? So, is the Lord's Supper only bread and wine as symbolic of the Lord's body and blood? Is it only body and blood transformed? Or is it all four elements miraculously given and miraculously received?

32. Read that explanation of Paul's in 1 Corinthians 11:23-31. What is required to receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner?

33. Why do most churches require a period of instruction before participating in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

34. Why do you think the Lord in His wisdom provided a physical act of worship like the Lord's Supper for His followers to use throughout their lives? Aren't the Bible and prayer enough?

35. Conclude your FITEEN in prayer. Pray for greater faith and a deeper appreciation of all the ways God has provided for us to renew and grow our faith until we meet Him again in heaven.

Week Six - *Baptism*
Colossians 2:9-15

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. If an unbelieving friend were to ask you why baptism was important, what answer would you give?
2. Most Christians know that baptism is important, but we sometimes struggle with the specifics of why. To help us with this question, read Colossians 2:11-15. To what ritual does the letter writer, Paul, compare our baptism?
3. What do you know about circumcision? Do you know anything about its practice or its purpose?
4. The ritual of circumcision is introduced in Genesis 17:10-14. Go to that passage and read it. Look especially at verses 13-14. What is the purpose of circumcision?
5. If circumcision makes us a part of God's covenant (legally adopted) family, how does baptism serve a similar function?
6. At what point does someone officially become a child of God? In light of this, why do you think it was important that circumcision happen on the eighth day of someone's life? What implications does this have for our own practice of baptism?
7. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, use these words as your prayer: "God, my sin had left me broken and far from You. You could have just washed Your hands of me, but You chose to rescue me. Through baptism, You washed away my sin. But You didn't stop there. You also gave me the gift of your own Spirit. When I feel unworthy, remind me of the lengths to which You have gone to in order to adopt me. Amen."

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. What is your personal baptism story? Were you baptized as a child or when you were older? Who was there? How important an event was this in the story of your life? When you tell the story, do you talk about being "put to death" in your baptism?
9. Read Colossians 2:11-15, especially verse 12. How is this language different from the way we usually talk about baptism?
10. Christians often talk about how Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross saved us from sin and death. But what role does baptism play as part of Jesus' miraculous salvation?
11. Scripture gives us two powerful images to help us understand the miraculous importance of baptism in our own

personal salvation story. Read the first one: 1 Peter 3:18-21. To what famous story does Peter liken our baptism?

12. Now read 1 Corinthians 10:1-2. What significant event does Paul use to describe baptism?
13. What is the common thread between these stories? What action did God perform for Noah's family and the Israelites that He now performs for us in baptism?
14. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, use these words as your prayer: "God, sometimes I feel like You are very far away from me. Help me to remember that, through my baptism, You drew close to me. You are here every single day for me, and You are never far from me. Thank You for being with me every moment of every day. Amen."

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. What does baptism do for you? What special benefits or powers does it impart? We've talked in the last two days about how baptism makes us part of God's family and rescues us. Now let's look at the specific benefits of baptism.
16. What does baptism accomplish regarding our sinful nature? (See Acts 2:38 and 22:16)
17. From what two negative things does baptism rescue us? (See Romans 6:3, 5 and Colossians 1:13-14)
18. What promised reward does baptism bring us? (See Mark 16:16 and John 3:5)
19. Through baptism, the Holy Spirit enters our heart and begins to create his qualities within us. Look at Galatians 5:22-23. What are the positive attributes of a Spirit-filled person?
20. What is one conscious choice you can make to embody one of these fruits of the Spirit throughout your day today?
21. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, use these words as your prayer: "God, sometimes I take You and Your gifts for granted. Earthly gifts fade away over time, but Your gifts are not like that. Your Spirit lives inside my heart and gives me gifts constantly! I praise You for giving me the peace, wisdom, joy and discernment that I need to honor you every day. Amen."

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Some Christian traditions teach that baptism is largely a symbol. It commemorates what God does in our hearts, but doesn't actually have any supernatural power. Do you agree or disagree with this position? Why?

23. Read Titus 3:5-8. This passage says that Christ saved us through what particular means?
24. Now read Ephesians 5:25b-26. Christ gave himself for us on the cross, but how does he actually clean us, his church?
25. Read Galatians 3:26-27. What act unifies us with Christ?
26. How necessary is baptism in a believer's life if it is merely a symbol? How necessary is baptism if it's a miraculous work of the power of God in our lives?
27. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, use these words as your prayer: "God, relationship is never just a one-way street. Whenever You give us a gift, the purpose is to draw us into a deeper relationship with You. The same is true for baptism, which opens the door for us to experience a dynamic relationship with You. Help us to sense Your presence and to call on you for help in our everyday lives. Amen."

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

28. Every Christian believer is engaged in a spiritual battle. Do you think this battle is primarily external or internal? Why?
29. What role might baptism play in spiritual warfare?
30. While there is an external spiritual battle that is important (Eph. 6:12), baptism equips us to fight an internal spiritual battle. Read Ephesians 4:21-24. What two forces are at work inside us?
31. What are some daily examples where you see that internal struggle play out in your life? (For me, it's when the alarm clock goes off or when I see that we're down to one cookie in the company break room.)
32. The good news is that we have a "ringer" on our side in this spiritual battle! Spend a few minutes looking up John 14:16, Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Who fights within us to give us the power to be holier?
33. How does it change your spiritual struggle if you can clearly identify the combatants: your new self, powered by the Holy Spirit; and your old self, powered by sinful desires?
34. Martin Luther recommends that we use our morning shower to remind ourselves of our baptism that equips us for our daily struggle against our old, sinful self. Today, choose one of the verses in this study (or find another Bible verse about your baptism), write it on an index card, put it inside a Ziploc bag, and post it in your shower to encourage you in the mornings.

35. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, use these words as your prayer:” God, it's amazing to think that You love me. But You love differently than the world loves. You do not love in a greedy or selfish way. You love in a pure and selfless way. You sent Jesus to rescue me and your Spirit to stay with me. And at any given moment, you are fighting for me. Thank you, God, for leaving no stone unturned. You care for me in the most thorough and complete way. I want to live my life in response to that, holding nothing back from you. I love you, Lord! Amen.”