

Week Five: *Archipelagos Are Better than Islands*
James 5:13-16

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Who is your oldest friend or group of friends? What is the most memorable or significant thing you ever did together?
2. What level of sacrifice would you be willing to make for each other? Help them move? Let them stay with you in your house last-minute? Donate a kidney?
3. It's hard to overstate the benefits of having a friend or group you can rely on in deep need. Now read James 5:13-16. What are some additional benefits of a group, described in this passage?
4. Most Christians would say that they don't have this kind of group that they could go to for healing prayer or confession and forgiveness of sins. What do you think are the perceived obstacles for being in this kind of group?
5. Larry Crabb, in his book *Connecting*, says that our unwillingness to be honest and grace-filled about our sins is what hinders the kind of connection James is describing:
Scripture tells us to confess our faults to at least one other member of our community. The journey toward Christ is intended to be a group expedition where we walk together as honest strugglers who believe the endpoint is worth any hardship. We share the life of Christ together and are called to nourish that life in one another; but we must also resist the urges of sin together. We must not be alone when we enter the death experience of discovering that our flesh-inspired strategies for living no longer work. ... The obstacle to connecting (the flesh) becomes our opportunity for deeper connecting when we recognize it and mortify it together.
6. In your own words, what action do you think Crabb is recommending to us for deeper connection?
7. Who is someone that you could take a leap and risk connecting with in a deeper way? A believing friend you could attempt to trust to share some of the sinful urges or brokenness that holds you back? Make a point of reaching out to that person in a transparent and humble way.
8. End your FIFTEEN by asking God to give you the courage to seek the “deeper connection” that comes from honesty about our urges and brokenness with another person.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

9. If, for some reason, you suddenly had to move out of your house, how would you make that happen? Would you hire movers? Take a couple of days off work and stay up late getting it done? Ask some friends for help?
10. Larry Crabb (see Day One) thinks that one of our “sinful agendas” that prevents deeper connection is “**City-Building**—depending on our own resources to make our lives work.” How much or little do you relate to that agenda? Why?

11. Read Genesis 4:10-17. What consequence did God give to Cain?
12. As a homeless wanderer, whose resources would Cain have had to rely on to survive? How might this have restored his connection to godly community?
13. What did Cain do instead? (See verse 17.) How did this act keep him estranged from God?
14. The next time you have a crisis and your knee-jerk reaction is to rely on your own resources, what could you do differently that would leverage that crisis into an opportunity to connect with someone else? How could you ask for help in a meaningful way?
15. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying that God would show you that he wants to give you all the resources you need to thrive in life, so that you don't need to suffer through, based on self-reliance. Ask for him to help you lean on others and on his provision for you!

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

16. When things in life get hard, who are the experts you tend to turn to for advice?
17. Larry Crabb (see Day One) thinks that one of our “sinful agendas” that prevents deeper connection is “**Fire-Lighting**—reducing the mystery of life to manageable categories of understanding.” Do you find that you react to uncertainty by trying to figure out the “right” ways to approach every problem?
18. Read Isaiah 50:10-11. What contrast does Isaiah describe?
19. When Fire-lighters run into a problem, their tendency is to turn to the experts to solve it. How does that limit reliance on God and others?
20. In turn, if you are “always right,” does that make others more or less likely to reach out to you for deeper connection? Why or why not?
21. Larry Crabb suggests that instead of asking “Am I right?” we should ask, “Whom do I trust?” How would this new question deepen your relationship with God and with other people?
22. This is a scary thing to pray, but use the rest of your FIFTEEN to ask that God would deepen your darkness by putting you in uncertain situations, to help you trust in him even when you don't know the right answers.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

23. In case of a hypothetical “zombie apocalypse,” how well do you think you’d do at surviving? How well prepared are you, in general, for possible future risks?

24. Larry Crabb (see Day One) thinks that one of our “sinful agendas” that prevents deeper connection is “**Wall-Whitewashing**—making it a priority to minimize risk, and protecting ourselves at all costs against whatever difficulties might frustrate our plans.” Do you find that an emphasis on safety tends to restrict the risks you take in life?

25. Read Ezekiel 13:1-16. How did the false prophets try to reassure the people?

26. How much of your well-being is derived from the illusion that things in your life are safe or predictable? If disaster struck, would it invalidate your relationship with God?

27. Is it ever “safe” to love another person wholeheartedly? Why or why not?

28. Who is someone that you have held yourself back in showing love for them in a deeper way, because of the possible risks involved? How could you make a brave, connecting choice to risk the possible repercussions of loving them in spite of uncertainty?

29. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying that God’s love would help you risk loving someone else boldly to open up the pathway for a deeper, life-giving connection.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

30. Our culture prioritizes the “pursuit of happiness.” What do you think are the benefits of such a focus? What are the possible problems?

31. Larry Crabb (see Day One) thinks that one of our “sinful agendas” that prevents deeper connection is “**Well-Digging**—making satisfaction and seeking pleasure the highest goal.” How have you prioritized pleasures in life over other priorities?

32. Read Jeremiah 2:1-13. In a nutshell, what “shocking” choice did God’s people make (see especially verses 11-13)?

33. What is the difference between the pleasures that God offers and the pleasures we try to create for ourselves?

34. How does prioritizing happiness and satisfaction keep us from deeper relationships with other people?

35. Pick an important relationship in your life. For one week, commit to not asking, “What benefit is this relationship to me?” but ask how you can prioritize the other person’s needs over your own.

36. End your final FIFTEEN this week by asking God to show you the deeper pleasure of finding purpose and joy through the sacrifice of our own self-focused outlook.