

Growing Deeper
Great Expectations

Week One: *The Perfect Gift: Taking God out of the Box*
Matthew 1:1-17; John 1:1-5, 9-14

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. How many generations will be part of your Christmas celebrations?
2. How far back do you know your ancestry? What stories are connected to your lineage?
3. Read Matthew 1:1-17. Which names do you recognize? What do you know about them?
4. Matthew is a bridge book linking the Old Testament, with its fervent anticipation of the Messiah, to the Messiah's arrival in the New Testament. Matthew's genealogy proves Jesus was descended from King David and therefore qualified to be the Messiah. What other things do you learn about Jesus from Matthew's genealogy?
5. This genealogy already takes us outside our expectations of God. Among Jesus' ancestors were prostitutes, non-Jews, and noted sinners. How does this change your understanding of God?
6. Matthew's genealogy also reveals God's promise-keeping. When sin came into the world, God promised a rescuer. Jesus came as promised and was much more than expected. In what part of your life do you need God's rescue?
7. End your FIFTEEN talking to God and then listening to him. Ask him to show you places where you have limited expectations of his rescue. Ask him to expand your understanding of his love and power.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Is a nativity part of your Christmas traditions? In what way?
9. Read John 1:1-5, 9-14. How often do you think of this passage when you think of Christmas?
10. Read the passage again. This time replace "the Word" with the name Jesus. What startling things does this passage say about Jesus?
11. Compare the John passage with the way Matthew starts his gospel. What conclusions do you draw?

12. John's gospel begins with a poetic prologue that traces Jesus' origins to eternity past. John 1:10 says the world did not recognize him as their life- and light-giving God. Why do you think this happened? Does it happen today? Why?
13. End your FIFTEEN reading verses 1-5 aloud slowly. Read it over and over in worship and thanksgiving. Let Jesus expand your understanding of who he is and what he is capable of.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. Do you make out a Christmas list or do you like to be surprised on Christmas morning? Why do you think that is?
15. How do you react when you receive a gift that is totally unexpected?
16. Read John 1:14. Try to put this verse into your own words.
17. What about these statements is unexpected? Why?
18. God became human and came to live among humans. How did this make people of Jesus' day uncomfortable? How does this make people uncomfortable today?
19. John was an eyewitness of God coming to "dwell" among people. John ate, slept, walked, and talked with Jesus, who was God. End your FIFTEEN contemplating what it would be like to have God physically present all through your day. Pray through your response.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. What would you consider a perfect gift to receive?
21. What would you consider a perfect gift to give?
22. Read Matthew 1:1-17 and John 1:1-5, 9-14 again. What does it mean when we say Jesus is fully God and fully human?
23. While Matthew gives us the lineage of Jesus' humanness, John shows us his divine lineage. Taken together, God has done something unthinkable. What did Jesus do that only a human could do? What did Jesus do that only God could do?

24. How does Jesus' full divinity and full humanity make him the perfect gift?

25. Spend the rest of your time in thanksgiving. Thank Jesus for the ways his humanness helps you. Thank him for the ways his divinity helps you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

26. What is your favorite Christmas carol? Does it focus more on the divinity of Jesus or the humanity of Jesus?

27. God's amazing revelation of himself as a Three in One God (the Trinity) is beyond our understanding. What illustrations have you heard to attempt to explain the Trinity?

28. Read John 1:1-5, 9-14. How does John write about the Trinity?

29. The statement that Jesus was "with" God is an affirmation of his separate personality. There is a diversity within the Godhead. "The Word was God" means everything that can be said about the God the Father can be said about God the Son. In Jesus, God is known. What is your reaction to an unsearchable being who goes to such lengths to be known?

30. Read John 17:20-21. Jesus desires each precious follower to be part of the mysterious, intensely loving relationship of the Trinity. What is your reaction to this?

31. To have a deep, vibrant relationship with the Triune God can be both scary and exhilarating. How does this invitation from Jesus transform your Christmas expectations?

32. End your FIFTEEN letting go of your fear. Ask God to take you deeper into himself.

Week Two: *Holiday Travel: The Case for a Bigger Journey*
Luke 1:26-38

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Are you traveling over the holidays this year, or will you have guests from out of town? Describe your current expectations for this travel.
2. It's human nature to have some type of expectation before any event—good or bad. How do your expectations about your holiday travels/guests impact the outcome of those events?
3. Read Luke 1:26-29. Describe what happened and what Mary's reaction was to that event.
4. Sometimes our prior experiences affect our reactions. If you were in Mary's shoes, how might this unexpected greeting have impacted your mindset even before the angel stated his purpose?
5. Do the angel's encouraging words from God soften the experience for Mary? Would it make a difference for you? Why or why not?
6. As we read throughout Scripture, Mary was a young woman with great faith, yet the reality of being face-to-face with a heavenly being still troubled her. No matter what we expect from God, often the reality of our situation can be hard to reconcile with our expectations. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, confess those times when you doubted God because of unmet expectations.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. Have you ever been bumped from your seat on an airplane, whether voluntarily or involuntarily? Did that unexpected delay turn out to be a good thing or a bad thing? Explain your answer.
8. Tommy Allsup was a guitarist who was part of singer Buddy Holly's band. He is probably best known for losing a coin toss that kept him off the plane that later crashed and killed Buddy Holly, as well as Ritchie Valens and J.P. "Big Bopper" Richardson. Allsup lived to be 85. How do you think he felt at the time he lost the coin toss versus after realizing the fate he'd been spared?
9. Read Luke 1:30-38. How do you think Mary initially felt as the angels spoke these words versus later in life when this miracle had come to pass?
10. Think of a time in your life where the outcome of a single event seemed to be life-changing, but in the long run, it was merely a small obstacle. How can you tell in the moment whether or not an event will have life-altering effects?

11. Look again at verse 34. What did Mary ask? What does that suggest about her thought process?
12. For Mary, this event was life-changing. In fact, it was world-changing! Maybe she did not grasp that at first glance, or maybe she did and took it in stride? It's hard for us to know. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to help you see beyond the single events of your life to focus on the long journey God has in store for you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

13. Travel at the holidays can be extra challenging, but traveling at any time can be difficult. Describe one of the most difficult trips you have ever taken. What did you learn from that experience? How did those issues affect your trip?
14. Thinking back to your difficult trip, were you able to finally reach your destination or did you abandon your plans? How did your willingness to persevere past the obstacles play in your decision whether or not to continue that trip?
15. Read Luke 1:26-28. What was Mary's ultimate reaction to the angel's news in verse 38?
16. As we saw yesterday, Mary's only question was about how it would happen. If you were in Mary's shoes, what would you have asked? Why would you want to know that information?
17. It's interesting that Mary asks what seems like a facts question but ends with a statement of faith. What role, if any, do facts play in faith for you?
18. In Mary's case, the facts of what would happen to her supported her belief that God is able to do as he promises. Do you struggle with believing that God is able to keep his promises? Do you struggle to believe he is willing to do as he promises? Explain your answer.
19. Mary believed that God was willing and able to do what he said he would. She trusted him. As you end your FIFTEEN, ask that God increase your faith so that you will always trust that he is willing and able.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. Yesterday you reflected on the worst experience you've ever had traveling. Did you continue traveling (or plan to) even though you had this bad experience? Explain your answer.
21. For most of us, one bad experience doesn't make us decide that all travel is awful and something to be avoided at all costs. Usually the desire to get to our destination overrides our need to avoid repeating bad experiences. How do past bad experiences color how you feel about traveling?

22. Look again at Luke 1:34-38. While it may feel much longer, being pregnant is a relatively short time compared to a woman's entire lifespan. Spend a few minutes reflecting on the ways her particular pregnancy may have been even more emotionally challenging than a typical one.
23. Mary is often entirely defined as the woman who gave birth to Jesus. As his mother, her role in his life was much greater than the nine months she carried him. Imagine what challenges she might have felt raising Jesus, especially knowing what the angel told her about him. Which one of those would you find most challenging?
24. Is it fair to characterize anyone by one moment? Why or why not?
25. Luke 1:38 states Mary's first leap of faith in her motherhood of Jesus, though it would certainly not be her last. It was just one part of her journey. We know that her faith was tested throughout Jesus' life. For most of us, our faith life contains a series of ups and downs—times when we feel close to God, other times when we feel distant. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you remain focused on him, strong in your faith, and not to define yourself by your moments of weakness or your moments of success.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

26. When you consider your faith life, is it a part of your life or does it impact every part of your life? Explain your answer.
27. Look again at Luke 1:26-38. Mary's life was about to be completely changed. She was going to need to rely on her faith every day of her life to deal with what was to come. How well do you keep your faith as an active part of your everyday life? How do you currently feel about your faith life?
28. Is it easier or harder for you to turn to faith in times of struggle? How about when times are good?
29. At Pathfinder Church, we use a mnemonic device called 1.1.15.6. to help us integrate faith into every aspect of our life. Read all four parts of the 1.1.15.6. printed on the front inside cover of this booklet and think about which one you would most benefit from incorporating into your life right now. Then brainstorm some practical steps that you can take to better integrate your faith life into your everyday life.

1.1.15.6: A Roadmap for your LIFEjourney

1: Give ONE DAY a week to God in worship and rest.

God has designed us for a rhythm of work and rest. He has called us to set aside one day each week to find rest in shared worship and a retreat from everyday life. We also worship God when we actively support the mission of the local church with our resources, including our time, energy, gifts, passions, abilities, and finances. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

1: Be someONE to another person in an intentional relationship.

Life transformation happens best when we are in relationship with others. Whether in one-on-one mentoring relationships, small groups, or any other form of intentional, committed community, we are intended to have deep connections with both Christians and non-Christians. (John 13:34-36)

15: Spend FIFTEEN MINUTES each day in a faith-building discipline.

Our relationship with God grows as we learn to daily connect with him. Bible reading, prayer, fasting, meditation, confession, and the Growing Deeper (or other Christian resources) are ways to connect with God all week long. (John 15:5)

6: Live the SIX other DAYS serving God by serving others.

Every minute of every day is an opportunity to live as God's representatives in the world. Whether in our neighborhoods, at school, on the job, with friends, on the field, or out in the community, we have been uniquely positioned to reflect God's love in the world as we serve others. (Matthew 5:14-16)

30. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, ask God to give you the faith to trust him in every area of your life so that you can act boldly when called upon to do so.

Week Three: *Tinsel and Lights: Discovering a Brighter Glory*

Luke 1:5-25

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. In non-religious, earthly terms, what does it mean when we talk about people earning "glory"?
2. What do you think "glory" means when we talk about God's glory? How is the meaning similar to or different from a human's glory?
3. The Old Testament uses the word "glory" almost two hundred times. Look up one particular passage, Isaiah 60:1-3. Based on this description, what kind of thing is the glory of God?
4. Now read Psalm 96:1-8. What is our job as people, regarding God's glory?
5. In your relationship with God, how often do you explicitly think of his "glory" as something to talk about and praise?
6. Why might it be important for your faith and for your witness to others to routinely think about God's glory?
7. Close your FIFTEEN by praying Psalm 96 aloud, giving praise as you describe God's glory in the words of the psalm.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Fire and light are double-edged swords. They bring heat and vision, but they can also burn and blind. When have you ever experienced being burned or blind?
9. Briefly look at Exodus 16:7 and Deuteronomy 5:24. In what way is God's glory like fire and light?
10. Now look at a curious moment in Moses' relationship with God: read Exodus 33:12-23. What was Moses asking of God?
11. Why did Moses say he wanted to see God's glory personally?
12. What did God warn Moses would be the consequence of seeing the fullness of God's glory? Think back on Deuteronomy 5:24. Why were the people scared of God's glory?

13. In the tension between desiring more of the presence of God and being scared of the overwhelming power of his glory, where do you tend to land? Why?

14. End your FIFTEEN by asking God to show you his glory, not to overwhelm, but to inspire and connect with you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. When you subconsciously think of God, does it evoke more of a comforting feeling or more of a terrifying feeling? Why?

16. God's glory—seen as fire and light—is a physical, earthly manifestation of his heavenly power. Look at Deuteronomy 5:24 from yesterday. What emotion did it evoke in people to see God's glory?

17. Read Exodus 40:1-3, 34-38. How did God limit and manifest his glory in this passage?

18. From this time on, how did the people know God was with them?

19. How do you think this changed the way the Israelites felt about God's presence? (If you need help with this, skim 1 Samuel 4-6, a story from a few years later.)

20. How do you know that God is with you? What reminds you of his presence in your life?

21. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to make it clear to you how he is with you constantly, moment by moment.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. We've seen this week how God placed his glory in the tabernacle as a comforting presence to his people. But now look at 2 Chronicles 7:1-3. Where did God's glory now reside?

23. Now we get to our nativity story. Read Luke 1:5-12. Where was Zechariah getting to serve?

24. The tabernacle, and then the temple, were the physical places where God voluntarily chose to keep his glory as a comforting presence for his people. But now read Luke 2:25-33. Where was God choosing to manifest his glory now?

25. God's glory reveals his majesty and it reveals his presence among his people. When Jesus walked the earth, how did he perform those same functions?

26. Based on what you've been reading, why was it important to God to routinely manifest his glory for his people and ultimately confine his glory to the person of Christ? (If you need help, check out Hebrews 1:3 and 2 Corinthians 3:7-18.)
27. In what ways have you experienced the glory and presence of Christ as transformative in your life?
28. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for sending Jesus Christ to powerfully expose his majesty and presence for you personally.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. This week we've seen how God has continuously revealed his majesty to his people in more and more personal ways—moving from fire and light, to a presence in the tabernacle and temple, to finally coming in the form of a man, Jesus Christ. How does this progression help you understand the intent behind the “glory” of God?
30. Read John 1:14-18. What relationship does Jesus Christ have with God the Father, because he has God's glory?
31. How does Christ's intimacy with God compare to your own evaluation of how connected you are to God?
32. Read John 17:22-24. What is Christ's hope and intention for our relationship with God?
33. What act did Jesus Christ do in order to pass his glory on to us?
34. How can you practically embrace the glory of God that Jesus has now placed in you?
35. End your FIFTEEN by praying and praising God for giving you his glory through Christ so that you can be intimately connected to his presence always.

Week Four: *Christmas Traditions: Rediscovering the Meaning Behind What We Do*
Matthew 1:18-25

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. What are some of your favorite Christmas traditions?
2. Read Matthew 1:18-19. What traditions were Mary and Joseph following? Consider the religious and cultural traditions of the first century.
3. How did the realization that Mary was with child change the expectations Joseph might have had?
4. Have you had to change your expectations for this Christmas season? How did they change? Why haven't they changed?
5. How have you seen God at work in your expectations of this Christmas season? End your FIFTEEN by asking God to speak to you about your expectations as Christmas Day draws near. Thank him for things that have or haven't changed. Ask him for grace and strength to handle what has or hasn't changed.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

6. Consider one of your Christmas traditions. How did that tradition become a tradition in the first place? When did it start? Did it happen by accident or was it carefully planned out?
7. Read Matthew 1:19-20. What was Joseph's plan and how did God speak to Joseph's idea?
8. Joseph had one idea of how to solve what he saw as a big problem with potential long-term consequences for himself and for Mary. God had another idea. Read Proverbs 16:9. When has God redirected your carefully laid plans?
9. God sent an angel to allay Joseph's fears and to give him another option. How does God speak into your life?
10. Through the angel, God's first words to Joseph were to call him by name: Joseph, son of David. God let Joseph know he was known by name by the Almighty God. Then he said, "Don't be afraid..." What verses are your favorite when you feel fearful or anxious? See Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 41:8-10, Isaiah 43:5, Philippians 4:6-7.

11. As you come closer to Christmas, ask God to settle your spirit to be open to new traditions and to new directions he may send your way.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

12. Traditions can serve a variety of purposes. What purpose do traditions serve in your home right now? Do they bring joy and laughter? Do they remind you of your family history? Do they bring your family together?

13. Reread Matthew 1:19-20. What purpose did God have for Joseph?

14. What purpose did God have for Jesus? (Read Acts 4:8-12 for Peter's statement of Jesus' purpose.)

15. God's purposes for Joseph and Jesus were far greater than Joseph's understanding at the time. Read 2 Peter 1:3-8. How has God used you in far greater ways than you expected?

16. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God for his purposes for you and how he uses you in his kingdom on earth right now. If you are feeling unused by God, read Psalm 139. God knows and loves you intimately. Ask God to show you how valued and useful you are in his kingdom.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

17. What are some of your traditions that have gone by the wayside? Why do you no longer continue them? Would you wish to bring them back?

18. Read Matthew 1:24-25. What was Joseph's decision concerning God's direction?

19. Joseph released his idea of what righteous behavior looked like in order to obey God's instructions. Read 1 Samuel 15:22. Samuel was speaking to King Saul about Saul's choice to do what he wanted to do instead of what God had asked him to do. What is God's desire for his people?

20. What does obedience to God's directions look like in your life?

21. Just like we outgrow and release some traditions because they don't fit our lifestyle or schedule, we can release our preconceived ideas for right behavior. End your FIFTEEN by confessing and asking God to turn your heart towards obedience instead of stubbornly holding to your own ideas.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

22. Throughout his book, the gospel writer Matthew wrote about the different ways that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Read Matthew 1:22-23. What is the first fulfilled prophecy?
23. Read Isaiah 7:14. How did God fulfill the prophecy?
24. Immanuel means God with us. Notice the lack of the verb: to be. Therefore, the name can truly be completed “God was with us,” “God is with us,” and “God will be with us.” Why is it important to you to know God named his son Immanuel, who is with us through all time?
25. Isaiah 9:6 also lists names that Jesus will be given. Which of these names for Jesus is a comfort to you? Why?
26. As you conclude your FIFTEEN, thank God for sending his son Jesus as a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Praise him for being one who keeps his promises.

Week Five: *Recycling Bins and Return Lines: Holding On To What's Lasting*
Luke 2:22-35

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

Merry Christmas from your friends at Pathfinder Church! Please read Luke 2:1-20 with fresh eyes. Then spend some time in prayer, thanking God for giving us the most incredible gift ever, his son Jesus.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

1. Now that Christmas is past and all the gifts have been unwrapped and food has been eaten, has anything happened that you will never forget? Write it down here or in a private journal if you keep one.
2. Read Luke 2:21-35. What was Simeon promised he would see before he died?
3. Talk about a Christmas you would never forget! Simeon had waited his whole life for a promise and now it had been fulfilled. Simeon's life was a lot of waiting, but he certainly had something to live for. Do you have something to live for or are you simply waiting?
4. The Christmas story is the most powerful story ever told. God did do something brand new that affects even how we live today. Brainstorm some ways we can keep the joy of Christmas with us all year long.
5. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Give thanks for the blessings and joy of Christmas.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

6. What was your favorite gift that you received for Christmas? How were you able to express gratitude for your gift?
7. Read Luke 2:22-35. For what purpose was Jesus brought to the temple?
8. Read Leviticus 12:6-8 to see the law regarding the purification offering. What does it say about Mary that she did not have a lamb to offer?
9. How does that make you feel to know that Jesus' earthly family was of modest means?
10. Jesus' birth was certainly not auspicious; neither was his family. Yet they were faithful to express their gratitude to God by fulfilling the requirements of the law to the best of their ability. If you were in their shoes, would you have felt self-conscious about your gift? Would you have been tempted not to do it to avoid looking shabby? Explain your answer.

11. As you end your FIFTEEN, give thanks to God for the gifts he gives us, even when our gifts to him can sometimes be shabby.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

12. Every year at Christmas, you probably get lots of gifts that you were somewhat expecting. But then there are those great moments where a gift completely surprises you. What is a delightful, surprising gift that you've received?

13. What if someone promised you an amazing gift, but didn't tell you *when* you would get it? What would your actions and attitude be while you waited?

14. What if a year went by and you still hadn't received the gift? How would that affect your attitude?

15. Look again at Luke 2:25-32. What gift had the Holy Spirit promised Simeon? How long had he waited for it?

16. What was his attitude while he waited for the promise? What action did he take as part of his expectation?

17. As you conclude your FIFTEEN, pray and ask that God would give you an attitude like Simeon's. Ask him to help you stave off apathy and hopelessness. Ask him to keep you focused on the promises he has made and to wait for them with eager expectation.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

18. What's the longest you have ever waited for something you wanted very much: months, years, still waiting?

19. Read Luke 2:22-35. How long has Simeon been waiting to receive what God had promised? How might Simeon have kept hoping as the years went by? Do you think it takes intentionality to keep hoping?

20. If you received what you had hoped for, how long did the feeling of gratitude last after receiving it? Do you still feel as grateful now as you did when you received it?

21. Think about the favorite gift that you identified earlier this week; do you still feel the same about it? Why or why not?

22. If it takes intentionality to keep hope alive prior to receiving a gift, it will require the same intentionality to keep gratitude alive after receiving it. What are some practical steps you can take to continue to focus on gratitude?

23. As you end your final FIFTEEN this Christmas week, ask God to help you stay as filled with hope in the promises he's given you this week all year long.