

Growing Deeper
2020 You

Week One: Empathy: seeing the world through the eyes of others
Romans 12:9-10, 13, 15-16

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. There's a buzzword in our culture today—the concept of “empathy.” Based on your own experience, how would you define or summarize “empathy”?
2. Watch this short, 3-minute reflection on empathy by Dr. Brené Brown.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw> How does Dr. Brown define empathy? How is it different from sympathy?
3. Now read Romans 12:9-16. Which of these verses would you say are describing “empathy”?
4. Now look more specifically at verse 15. What are some real-life examples of doing the things described in this verse?
5. Do those things feel foreign or natural to you? Why do you feel that way?
6. Who is in your life right now that is rejoicing or grieving? How could you choose to enter into that process with them?
7. End your FIFTEEN by praying and ask God to bring someone to your mind and heart that you can reach out to— simply to celebrate with them or to mourn with them.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Imagine this scenario: you're volunteering at a local high school and one of the students confides in you that he wants to drop out. What kind of emotional response would you give? Now imagine that you have a teenager and your own kid comes up to you and says he wants to drop out. How is your response different between the two scenarios?
9. What is the key difference in your relationships with these kids that changes your reaction?
10. Read Matthew 7:1-6. What natural human response is Jesus warning us against?
11. Think about the relationships you have that make you feel the safest and most included. Now think about the current relationships in your life that you feel the least comfortable in. On a scale of 1-5, how much judgment do you feel from people in the former group? The latter?

12. In this chapter, what are the characteristics of the kind of community Jesus wants us to be?
13. How would it feel to receive the benefits of not being judged by others? How hard would it be for you to offer that same lack of judgment to others?
14. End your FIFTEEN by asking God to remove the burden of “judgment” from you. Ask him to open your heart to receive people just the way they are, to share in their hurts and fears, and to respond with only connection and your caring presence in the midst of their hurting.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. If you were to ask your parents what’s wrong with our country today, what answers do you think they would give?
16. Now read James 1:19-22. Using his filter, what do you think James would say tends to be the main problem with human societies?
17. Verse 19 has three verbs: *listen*, *speak*, and *become angry*. Which one(s) should we be quick to do? Which one(s) should we be slow to do?
18. What value does *listening* provide to relationships?
19. If you think you already understand someone’s problem or situation, how much time do you now need to spend listening?
20. Give yourself a dare. See if you can go a whole day without *telling* anybody anything. Only listen and ask *questions*. You might be surprised at how that changes your dynamics for the better.
21. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying for God to help you have his ears and his heart for the people in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. If you’re traveling in a foreign country and accidentally break a local, cultural law, where would you rather face trial—in that country or in your home country? Why? What is the presupposition about your own national judge?
22. Theoretically, all judges would be about objective justice. But in practice, we would probably more trust the judge who shares our own cultural values. When you think about God’s judgment, does that feel like a foreign, hostile trial, or a local, friendly trial?

23. Read Hebrews 4:12-16. What astounding statement about the Divine Creator, Judge of the Universe does this author make?
24. According to verse 15, what was the point of God becoming Jesus, a human being who lived a life on Earth?
25. In light of Jesus' empathy, how does this change the way we can expect God's judgment of us to go? (See verse 16.)
26. God has seen deep into your soul, exposing your innermost thoughts and desires, and he responds with mercy. How can that change your own perspective on your own feelings and failings?
27. As you finish your FIFTEEN, pray for God to help you respond to his own empathetic mercy with grace and forgiveness for yourself.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

23. Is there anyone in your life that you think is beyond your compassion or empathy? What have they done to make you feel that way about them?
24. Read 2 Kings 5:1-6. What horrible thing had Naaman done to the Israelite maiden?
25. What was her response toward him when he became sick with leprosy?
26. What role do you think his vulnerability and pain had in allowing her to be able to express empathy for a man who had wronged her?
27. What would it take for you to be able to feel empathy for someone who had hurt you?
28. Who could you make a heroic choice to show empathy to right now in your life?
29. As you conclude your FIFTEEN, pray that God will give you his heartbroken empathy even for someone who seems so unsympathetic to you.

Week Two: *Self-Control: delaying self-gratification*
Romans 12:14, 19-20

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. What do you think of when you hear “self-control”? Does it throw you back to childhood and temper tantrums? Does it make you think of weight loss programs or exercise regimes? Write about your perception of self-control here.
2. What does God say about self-control? Read Galatians 5:13-26.
3. Where does self-control come from?
4. How does your perception mirror God’s Word? Where is it different? Ask God to shift your idea of self-control to be more in line with his.
5. To have fruit of the Spirit, we must have a relationship with God the Holy Spirit who lives in us. What will you do to develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit?
6. As you finish your FIFTEEN, ask God the Holy Spirit to become more real to you and for you to be able to see his fruit—the fruit of the Spirit—growing in you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. Elisha was a prophet of God who ministered to God’s people following the prophet Elijah. Elisha had followed Elijah for many years, yet he had one request when it was time for Elijah to be taken to heaven. Read 2 Kings 2:9-14. What did Elisha ask for from Elijah? Did he receive it? How do you know?
8. Not everyone has the Holy Spirit living in them. Read 2 Kings 5:1-16. How does Naaman’s lack of the Holy Spirit affect his understanding of Elisha’s instructions?
9. How does Elisha exhibit self-control when offered gifts by Naaman?
10. You received the Holy Spirit in your baptism (Matthew 28:18-20) or when you first received Christ as your Savior (Galatians 3:14). How does it feel to know that the same Spirit who resided in Elijah and Elisha resides in you as well?
11. Thank God for his Holy Spirit who lives in you. Ask him to help you recognize his voice more clearly and know him more deeply.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

12. Where do you feel that you exert self-control well?

13. Where do you feel like you lack self-control?

14. God is faithful to help us strengthen our self-control in areas where we ask for help: attitude, mind, and mouths...and many more. God is not limited. These are just a few that many struggle with. Read James 3:1-12. What does God's Word say about our tongue?

15. What word pictures does James use to describe the power of the tongue?

16. It is easy to think of the many ways that we have failed to control our speech. How has God used your tongue to bring about good? (Proverbs 15:4, 18:20-21, 21:23) How would you like the Holy Spirit to help you bless others with your speech?

17. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to use the Holy Spirit to guard your tongue and to guide your speech.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

18. Where have you seen the Holy Spirit at work strengthening or reminding you of self-control at this point in the week?

19. The Holy Spirit can help control our attitudes towards one another. Read Romans 12:14, 19-20. Consider the relationships in your life that are easy to maintain. What makes them easy? Thank God for providing those relationships.

20. Think on the relationships that are more challenging. What makes them more difficult? Read this article about healthy relationship boundaries. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/healthy-relationships-req_b_10884752

21. What can you do to reframe (control your mindset about) these relationships? How can using a boundary be a blessing for you and/or for others?

22. Reread Romans 12:14, 19-20 with an eye towards how you can control yourself in relationships. How can you be a blessing to someone else?

23. Thank God the Father for his relationship with you through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Ask God to provide opportunities to practice loving others and to trust him with justice.

24. Read this article on extra-grace-required people in our lives. Remember: sometimes we ALL can be the EGR people. <https://www.christianpost.com/trends/how-christians-should-deal-with-people-with-egr-extra-grace-required.html> End your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you have self-control with EGR people, especially yourself.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

25. Sometimes the battle for self-control isn't just in our interactions with others but a battle for our minds. Where or when do you find yourself battling for your mind? What is the battle over?
26. What do you do when you find your mind dwelling where it doesn't belong?
27. Read Isaiah 26:3 and 2 Corinthians 10:5. What tools does God give us to keep our minds steadfast and take our thoughts captive?
28. Choose a verse from the week that the Holy Spirit is bringing to mind. Commit it to memory or put it on a card to keep in a visible place.
29. As you finish your FIFTEEN, pray through the verse. Ask God to bring it to mind as he strengthens your self-control.

Week Three: Integrity: breaking down the self-deceptions that keep us from acting ethically
Romans 12:15-17

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Let's dig deeper into what it means to display integrity on a God-directed journey. (Integrity is the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values. *Wikipedia*) Reread Romans 12:15-17. What are some necessary mindsets to be a bringer of peace?
2. As we spend time during our FIFTEEN over the next week reflecting on integrity, we will study some necessary character attributes that enhance and make integrity possible. First, identify someone in your life that exemplifies integrity. What characteristics come to mind as to why?
3. Integrity is startling sometimes when we see it today. It lies in stark contrast with other things that the world values. Our God forgives and is gracious towards His children. How can the concept of taking the long view or seeing the big picture help with reflecting integrity in yourself?
4. Read 1 Peter 2:9. If God has such a high view of us and entrusts us to continue his mission on earth, how then should we view decisions and interactions with others?
5. Do you struggle with seeing the bigger picture? What are some areas that you are tempted to compartmentalize and not share in the vision that God has for you?
6. If we are going to pursue integrity as part of God's intention for carrying out his mission, we must be constantly reminding ourselves of our real identity and our purpose. End your FIFTEEN by recognizing the areas in your life where God may be excluded, and begin this week to give you a vision of how he may direct you towards extending his Lordship over all areas of your life. "Cast your cares on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. As we continue to take a closer look at integrity, today we will look at a character trait that intertwines with it called responsibility. When you think of responsibility, why would it be linked to integrity?
8. When we think in terms of our relationship with God, let's read Proverbs 28:13. "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." How is confession related to responsibility, and how does it help our relationship with God?
9. In addition to being responsible to God for our choices, how do the acts of being vulnerable and admitting our mistakes go a long way in displaying integrity to others?
10. Let's read Colossians 3:23-24. "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." How would this verse speak to

integrity in our work?

11. Again, we must avoid the danger of just keeping up with appearances. Our pursuit of integrity reaches into every part of our life. What do you think is needed to be real and authentic in your pursuit of integrity in all areas of your life?
12. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, pray that in your pursuit of Godliness that you are including the most important virtue. "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:14)

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

13. Describe a time when a task or attitude became more manageable because of your connection to a group that shared a common purpose.
14. Let's revisit 2 Kings 5:10-13. Pay particular attention to the interaction of the servants. In what way did they model accountability to Naaman?
15. Having someone to share your dreams, goals, setbacks, weaknesses, and shortcomings with is part of an attribute called accountability. How is accountability related to having a true reflection of integrity?
16. What is necessary for the condition of your heart to accept accountability?
17. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken." If we are to walk a life filled with integrity, how is connection with others mutually beneficial?
18. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, use Psalm 139 as a guide and ask God to help refine your heart in a way that allows His purity to show through your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

19. As we reflect on the qualities that contribute to integrity (vision, responsibility, accountability), we will add self-awareness to our study this day. Read Matthew 11:28-30. From where does self-awareness come to the follower of Christ?
20. Recall a time in your life where your internal struggles and conflicts were the cause of lack of inner peace. How was the conflict within you resolved?

21. Romans 12:17-18 says, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." What kind of mindset is necessary to have peace?
22. Read James 4:1-3. What is the cause of quarrels and fighting among us?
23. How does self-awareness, conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires, help form and shape integrity in an individual?
24. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying that God would reveal your heart and motivation for engaging in a walk towards greater integrity.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

25. We began our series on "2020 You" with the character formation of empathy. Describe a time when you were touched by a person's show of empathy for you.
26. Empathy is "the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference, that is, the capacity to place oneself in another's position." *Wikipedia*. How can empathy be linked to integrity?
27. Read Luke 19:1-10. As you read the story of Zacchaeus, take note of all we have mentioned about steps to integrity this week. (Responsibility, self-awareness, and empathy as well as integrity.)
28. What qualities of Jesus do you think that Zacchaeus found appealing? What qualities of Zacchaeus make it remarkable that Jesus interacted with him?
29. It is possible to be alone in your integrity, but how does that help spread God's Kingdom? What empathy does is work through building connection. Describe a time when you built greater connection through showing empathy. How does that work to influence a person?
30. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, consider all that it means to be on a God-directed journey. Be on the lookout for ways to practice building your integrity in the months to come. Ask God for a heart that beats for others and **longs to make connection.**

Week Four: *Embracing diversity: recognizing human differences and appreciating them*
Romans 12:3-8

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Embracing diversity seems to be another buzzword lately. What is your gut reaction to the concept of embracing diversity?
2. Typically, we consider embracing diversity as something we should do because it is the *right thing* to do for others. How does knowing that embracing diversity is a success skill affect how you feel about it?
3. Read Romans 12:3-8. What is one benefit to diversity shown in these verses?
4. Read Ephesians 4:15-16. How is having diversity in giftedness a more efficient way of getting work done?
5. What other practical applications does this design offer? Brainstorm a short list.
6. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to open your heart and mind to make you teachable this week as you consider the success skill of embracing diversity.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. Look again at Romans 12:3 and consider yourself with sober judgment. What types of things are you good at and what are you not good at?
8. If God created each of us with different gifts and no one with all gifts, how does that make you feel about your inability to excel at everything?
9. How about in others? How would you rate your ability to accept the gifts or shortcomings in others?
10. When we look at diversity as a way to fill in our gaps, we begin to see a tool that truly is a success skill; after all, no one can do everything, but together we can accomplish so much more. Think back to question 7. What were some of your shortcomings you thought of? Who are the people in your life that fill in some of those gaps?
11. When you think about the people that come to mind in question 10, what are some of the ways you fill in gaps for them?
12. Look again at Romans 12:5. Who do we belong to?

13. End your FIFTEEN with a prayer of gratitude. Thank God for the gifts he's given you, and even your shortcomings. Then, thank him for the people he's given you that help you where you need it most.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. When you think of diversity, what comes to mind? Quickly jot down a definition.
15. Read Galatians 3:28. What types of divisions are listed in this verse?
16. Which types of diversity are easiest for you to embrace? Which types are the most difficult? Explain your answer.
17. Let's look again at our very interesting story in 2 Kings 5:17-19. For what did Naaman ask Elisha to forgive him? What was Elisha's response?
18. Elisha's response could have been, "Yes, I forgive you for that." Or "I understand." What does his response say to you?
19. Read Hebrews 12:14. If one of the benefits of embracing diversity is learning to live in peace with others, how will that benefit you? Try to use some specific examples.
20. As you finish your FIFTEEN today, ask God to help you to learn to live in peace with others.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

21. Have you ever been a part of a group project, whether at school, work, as a volunteer, or even a family project? Did you enjoy working with others or was it just something you had to do?
22. Working with others is nearly unavoidable in life. Even if your work does not require group work, we are all part of other groups. Vacations with our families, planning weddings or funerals, even dividing up former family homes or estates, to name a few. What makes them some of the most contentious moments in life?
23. Last week we looked at empathy as a success skill. How does empathy help you to embrace diversity?
24. Look again at Romans 2:3-8. How does remembering that others might have skills and gifts we don't have help us to embrace their differences?

25. Look at your answer to question 22; if part of your answer was that other people's opinions and ideas make it more difficult, how can you take steps to embrace what others have to say? (For instance, employ empathy to understand other's perspectives.)
26. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to help you recognize in times when embracing diversity is required that it is also a blessing to you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

27. As we have been looking at this week, one of the benefits of diversity is that it is easier to get work done with a diverse set of skills and experiences. But there is another side to diversity; read Revelation 7:9-10. How is God's idea a perfection painted in heaven?
28. Now list all of the benefits you enjoy by experiencing other cultures. (i.e., travel, experiencing new food.)
29. Which of these is your favorite? How does it enhance your life? What does he teach us to pray for in verse 10?
30. If a diverse heaven is God's ideal—his picture of perfection—and he tells us that we need to pray for our Earth to be more like heaven, it makes sense that our world being diverse will make it better. How does that impact your willingness to embrace diversity?
31. Spend your final FIFTEEN this week in prayer, asking God to let the values of his kingdom rule in our hearts and minds.

Week Five: *Grit: persevering in the face of challenge*
Romans 12:11-12, 21

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read 2 Kings 5 and Romans 12:11-12, 21. What similar themes do you see?
2. Perseverance is one theme in these passages. From Romans 12:11, at what are God's people to persevere?
3. Why is serving God hard?
4. Why was it difficult for Naaman to persevere?
5. Make a list of things that challenge your perseverance (e.g. I don't understand, it's costly, it's embarrassing, etc.). End your FIFTEEN discussing your list with your Heavenly Father. Ask God where he wants to transform your thinking and enable your perseverance.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

6. Read Romans 12:11-12, 21. Now read the same passage in the Message Version, "Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality." The Message (MSG) How would you define zeal and spiritual fervor?
7. How do zeal and spiritual fervor tie into perseverance?
8. The opening statement of this paragraph (verse 9) in Romans 12 declares, "Love must be sincere." How do zeal, fervor, and perseverance express sincere love?
9. How could wrongly directed zeal and fervor negatively impact serving God and genuine love?
10. What determines for you when to persist and when to stop and cut your losses?
11. End your FIFTEEN looking at where you are zealous and fervent. Ask God to clarify your motivations. Ask him to align your eagerness and persistence to his wisdom.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

12. Read 2 Kings 5. Why did Naaman want to give up and go home?

13. How did Naaman's servants change his mind?

14. How does a life of ease challenge perseverance?

15. To obey God's commands often doesn't seem heroic. More often, it is hard or humbling. How does evil benefit when we lose heart?

16. In John 16:33 Jesus promises, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Evil's defeat is sure. End your FIFTEEN in worship. Boldly ask for victory where you have lost heart.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

17. Whom do you know personally or in history that persevered in the face of challenge?

18. What kept them from giving up?

19. Read Romans 12:12. What attitudes and action does Paul advise will undergird perseverance?

20. What key role does prayer play in perseverance?

21. In Naaman's life, the Israelite slave girl and his servants were unexpected conduits of God's love and power. Who are conduits of God's love and power in your life?

22. How has God used people to help you persevere?

23. End your FIFTEEN in thanksgiving. Thank Jesus for the privilege of prayer, the trustworthiness of his promises, and the people he sends to care for you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

24. Have you ever experienced a situation when perseverance seemed impossible?

25. What made this seem true?

26. Look at 2 Kings 5 and Romans 12:11-12; 21 again. What have you learned about God?

27. What have you learned about yourself?

28. How does Jesus make perseverance possible?

29. In these passages, we've seen the unexpected nature of God's grace and mercy. We've seen that God is not limited by obstacles. With God, there is much more to life. End your FIFTEEN rejoicing in a personal, all-powerful God.