

Growing Deeper

Clean Slate

Week One – Clean Slate

Lamentations 3:21-26

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. I just read an interview of a 100-year-old veteran of Pearl Harbor. His story is told in the newly released book, *All the Gallant Men; An American Sailor's First Hand Account of Pearl Harbor*, a story he kept to himself for 60 years. What hurt, pain or hardship have you tried unsuccessfully to forget?
2. Read Lamentations 3:19-20. Describe what it means for a person to remember something so awful they feel his or her soul is downcast within him/her? Do you know someone unable to move on in life?
3. What does it take for a person to cope with catastrophic loss? Are there steps that can be taken to ease pain?
4. What does the phrase, "He died a long time ago, they just haven't had the funeral yet." mean to you? Do you know someone who is just going through the motions of life?
5. What can you do to help? What have you tried to do to help?
6. What does the phrase mean, "Only when the student is ready, will the teacher appear?" Is there anything that can be done to create a teachable moment?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for those who have given up hope on life and for your ability to be granted the privilege of caring for them.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. To capture the story of a 100-year-old Pearl Harbor survivor in his book, *All the Gallant Men; An American Sailor's First Hand Account of Pearl Harbor*, it took the author 45 minutes of driving each way once a week for 6 months to share coffee with the veteran before the old man began to cry and tell his story; a story he had never told anyone before. What does that say about helping someone overcome a devastating experience in life?
9. The moment of vulnerability began with three words, "It was bad," followed by a long pause and sobbing. Later the veteran said, "Being able to tell him what happened lifted a great weight from my shoulders." How important is it for a person to feel safe enough to tell his story?
10. Who do you have in your life to whom you could tell your story of unbearable hurt?

11. Read John 14:4-9. Even those closest to Jesus did not truly understand His purpose and mission. How did that add to the savior's suffering?
12. Read Lamentations 3:27-33. What purpose does suffering serve in the life of a person and in the life of a Christian?
13. Read Mark 1:35-39. Why do you think time alone with His heavenly father was so important to Jesus? Do you routinely make time to be alone with your heavenly father? Explain.
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in silent prayer. Share your deepest hurts and pain with the Lord. Perhaps, like the Pearl Harbor survivor, you will feel unburdened to tell your story.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Read Lamentations 3:21-26. Which verse was the most important to you? Explain.
16. Read Romans 11:1. How is faith described? Why do you suppose God has kept so much about your future a secret from you?
17. How important is attitude when dealing with the future? How would you describe your attitude about the future most days? Why do you feel that way?
18. Look again at Lamentations 3:22. This passage says, "His compassions never fail." That suggests that we have a history of experiencing the Lord's compassion in our life. How should our past inform our future?
19. Describe three things that happened in the Bible that give you confidence to trust God in your future.
20. Describe three things that have happened in your own personal past that give you confidence to trust God in your personal future.
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for the Lord to sustain a more positive and expectant attitude for the future.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. The same Hebrew word is used to describe waiting on the Lord in Lamentations 3:25-26 and in Isaiah 40:28-31. How important is the message contained in those two scriptures?

23. The Hebrew word for wait is “quavah.” It is sometimes translated hope. It has an air of expectancy to it. How are the terms wait, hope and faith each important to describe our standing before God?
24. When God tells you to wait, what does that mean to you?
25. When you wait for a ride, or for your birthday, or for an important letter; there is little expected of you. There is literally nothing you can do except be hopeful. Is that the same as the waiting described in these passages? What’s the difference?
26. Read the story of the master who went on a journey in Matthew 25:14-30. While the servants were waiting on his return, what did the master expect them to be doing?
27. How do the Lord’s past compassions and blessings influence the attitude we have while we wait for blessings that are new every morning?
28. Conclude your FIFTEEN by praying for the Lord to prompt you to know His will for your life while you wait for new blessings.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. When you look to others for support in your struggles, do you prefer people who have no idea what you are facing or people who’ve overcome similar hardships? Why?
30. Based on your answer to the previous questions, why do you suppose the Lord doesn’t shield Christians from all hardship? See Romans 5:1-5.
31. Do you know some people who have led a sheltered life? Perhaps they were raised with wealth and privilege. How can we keep blessings from becoming detrimental to life?
32. Have your children, or the children you know best, had it easier or harder than you? Has that made it harder or easier on them in life? Explain.
33. Someone has said if you can accomplish all your dreams on your own, your dreams are too small? What do you think they meant?
34. What’s the difference between waiting and waiting patiently?

35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for patience as you wait on the Lord to rescue you from your present struggles and reveal His future plans for your life.

Week Two – Clarify Your Priorities
Matthew 6:28-34

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. If worry is one extreme and apathy its polar opposite, which do you think is the greater vice?
2. Is all worry wrong? When does sincere concern cross the line to become sinful worry?
3. What's the thing you would most like to change in your life in the new year? What would it take to accomplish that change? Is it doable? Why?
4. Read James 4:13-17. Is God against making plans for a better future? What caveat does He suggest in all plans?
5. So often people describe a bad situation as God's will that we must accept. Is everything that happens God's will? Explain.
6. Read Romans 8:28. Does this passage say, "God causes all things?" What role do the sinful world, the devil and our own sinful nature play in the consequence of life?
7. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater clarity in understanding the priorities you want to establish in the new year.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Matthew 6:28-34. Which verse caught your attention?
9. Fear is worry about something specific. Anxiety is a state of general concern over the unknown. Do you sometimes suffer from anxiety? How common and issue do you think anxiety is in people's lives?
10. What reason does the gospel give us in verse 32 to not be anxious?
11. There was a time when Christians felt no responsibility to provide for themselves other than pray. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14. What advice does God have about those who feel no need to take personal responsibility for their lives?
12. What's the difference between helping someone who needs a hand and enabling them in self-destructive behavior by providing too much help or the wrong kind of help?

13. Have you been harmed by someone who meant well but their help actually contributed to your inability to cope? Have you ever wondered if the help you gave to someone had crossed the line and become enabling?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying for God to help you better understand how and when to help another person in need without crippling him or her.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-11. What does the Bible say is the key to a life well balanced between physical needs and spiritual significance?
16. Compare this advice to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33.
17. Would you be content with enough food, shelter and clothing? Describe the difference between contentment and a desire to set goals and accomplish greater things?
18. Are you content in your present situation? Is it inherently wrong to want more or want to achieve more? Is it possible to be both content and ambitious?
19. List what you consider to be the six most important aspect of a well-lived life.
20. Out of those six, which three do you feel good about in your life and which three do you think still require your focused attention?
21. End your FIFTEEN by praying for a grateful heart and contentment for the blessings you have in your life at the present.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Read Matthew 6:33. Explain what this means in your own words? How does it apply to your life?
23. What are the differences between necessities and desires?
24. On a scale of 1 to 10, what score would you give yourself when measuring how effectively you live within your income?

25. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. What does this passage suggest is the goal of a balanced life? Do you consider yourself a generous person? Would others agree?
26. Do you know anyone who has fewer material possessions than you but appears to be happy? How is that possible?
27. Think for a moment about your immediate family situation. Who in your immediate family is more easily satisfied with your present status in life? Do you consider that an asset or a detriment to your ambitions in life?
28. Conclude your FIFTEEN in a prayer of gratitude for all the things God has given you. Be specific.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. According to Matthew 6:34. Why should you not be anxious about tomorrow?
30. In the Lord's Prayer, there is only one petition about physical needs. The rest of the petitions in the prayer deal with spiritual values. What does that suggest? Do your prayers reflect the same ratio of spiritual values versus physical needs?
31. The petition of the Lord's Prayer that asks for necessities asks only for today's necessities. In the Old Testament, how often did God send manna? What happened if the people tried to hoard the manna? What was God trying to teach Israel through this lesson?
32. Matthew 6:34 says, "Each day has trouble enough of its own." What does that mean? What trouble are you encountering today? How does God use our troubles to our own benefit?
33. What's the difference between worrying about tomorrow and making plans to improve your situation?
34. According to Matthew 6:32, there should be a difference between the concerns and values of non-believers and believers. Do you think that is largely true or, in your observation, do believers and non-believers pretty much worry and concern themselves with the same things?
35. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray silently for someone you know who worries too much. Pray for God to prompt an opportunity for you to share your faith and help him or her to become more reliant on God's love and grace.

Week Three – *Decelerate Your Mind*

Mark 1:35-39

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Many people talk about the need for margin in our lives—cushions of time that we've built in so we're not always racing from one obligation to the next. How much "margin" would you say you have in your life right now?
2. What do you think would be the first steps towards getting margin into your life?
3. Dr. Stephen Covey has a parable he shares. You can read it here: www.appleseeds.org/big-rocks_covey.htm How would you grade your ability to "put the big rocks in first"?
4. Let's see how Jesus found a way to get his "big rocks" in. Read Mark 1:35-39. What was Jesus' practice for making time with his Father?
5. What demands of life make it hard for you to follow this example?
6. What is a possible "little rock" you could resolve to get rid of in your life? For the rest of this week, the Growing Deeper is going to spend each day in a psalm. Plan to make time to read the poetry of Psalms this week.
7. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God's Holy Spirit to aid you in making room for the big rock of His Word. Ask for God to open your understanding as you meditate on His poetry.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Start your time today by reading Psalm 1. Once you've read it, read it again and then read it a third time. What strikes you after reading it several times?
9. This psalm is an example of a wisdom psalm. It teaches something to the reader. What two types of people does this psalm contrast?
10. What are the promised benefits to a righteous person? What are the promised consequences to a wicked?
11. What does it take to be a righteous person? (See verses 1-2.)
12. Into which category do you think you fall? Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Does this change or reinforce your original answer?

13. When do you think the event described in verses 5 and 6 will happen? What will be the outcome for you when it does?

14. Finish your FIFTEEN by praising God that He has given you His wisdom in this first psalm. Thank Him for sending Jesus Christ to make us righteous, and to stand with us on the final judgment day!

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Today we will read Psalm 103. After you've read it once, read it a second time. Then read it a third time. What thoughts occur to you?

16. This psalm is an example of a praise psalm. It describes God in ways that honor Him. It introduces God's character to the reader. What are some of the ways this psalm describes God?

17. Are some of these words, actions and adjectives the same as the way that *you* naturally talk about God? Which descriptions are the same? Which are different?

18. The psalmist is describing the great things God has done for him. How are these similar to what God has done for you?

19. According to the psalm, what should our reaction be to God's works? In what specific ways do you do this, outside of a church service?

20. Pick one of these expressions about God and use it to describe God to someone with whom you will interact today. Just like the psalmist does, tell that person about why God is amazing and worthy of our praise!

21. As you conclude your FIFTEEN, praise God for what He has done in your life and for what blessings He has waiting for you in eternity.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Start your time with God by reading Psalm 13. Read it twice. Read it thrice. What did you notice in this psalm?

23. This psalm is an example of a lament psalm. It recognizes that even believers can experience tragedy and evil things. Has there ever been a time when you felt abandoned by God? When was it?

24. Does it seem odd that the Bible would include a psalm about feeling abandoned by God? Why do you think this psalm is in here?

25. What question is the psalmist asking God repeatedly?
26. What answer does he finally find?
27. On what does our ultimate hope rely?
28. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God that He will never abandon us, no matter how bad things in our life get.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. To close out our week, we will read Psalm 30. As before, read it three times. What themes stick out in your multiple readings?
30. This psalm is an example of a thanksgiving psalm. It thanks God for His mighty rescue from trouble. What are some examples of times that you have given God thanks for something specific He did in your life?
31. In verse 5, the psalmist says that weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. How does this match your own experience?
32. Sometimes it may feel like the morning of rejoicing doesn't come. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. What might the timing be for the promised joy?
33. Read Psalm 30:6-10. Into what trap do believers need to be careful not to fall?
34. How can you show God your thankfulness for His rescue from sin, death and the devil?
35. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Give God thanks for what He has done in your life. Thank Him for your salvation and for the eternal morning that will come for all of us in heaven.

Week Four – *Simplify Your Surroundings*
Ecclesiastes 5:10-15

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Have you ever lived on a steady diet of junk food? Maybe while on a vacation or a student's budget? Perhaps this describes you during this past holiday season? How did you feel during that time?
2. Eventually everyone recognizes that there's no satiety in eating only empty calories. Ultimately we all crave healthy food. The problem with living on food intended to be a treat is that we're using it for the wrong role. What other things in life can we misuse in the wrong role?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-15. What does Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, warn us against in verse 10?
4. How is *loving* money using it for the wrong role?
5. Money is a blessing from God. It's meant to take care of us and to provide for our needs; it was never meant to satisfy our souls. According to Isaiah 58:11, what/who will satisfy us?
6. End your FIFTEEN by reading Psalm 145:15-17. Use these words as you pray.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

7. There's an old saying: "Where there's a will, there's a relative." What does this quote suggest about the lure money has for people?
8. Read Ecclesiastes 5:11. Solomon was perhaps the wealthiest man of his time, maybe ever by relative standards. He knew a thing or two about the entrapments of wealth. What do you think he meant by, "As goods increase, so do those who consume them?"
9. One thing we know is true: the more we consume, the more our appetites seem to increase. As a result, we can increase! Describe an example where you've seen this happen.
10. Verse 11 also suggests that the more goods we have, the more people will surface to consume our abundance. Describe a time when you saw this happen.
11. Read Proverbs 14:20-21. What does wealth attract?

12. If wealth naturally attracts “friends”, how can we tell if a friend is true and not just interested in what he or she can get from us? How does it feel to not know how to tell the difference?
13. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Confess those times your interest in being a friend to someone was not borne out of pure motives. Then ask God to always turn toward others in the spirit of true friendship.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

14. A trap often includes an element of surprise and often some kind of bait. The element of surprise can be something of which we are completely unaware (I didn't know that the pothole was there) or it can be something we know is there, but has an unexpected consequence (I had no idea the pothole was that deep.) What is the difference between not realizing a trap is there and not understanding the consequences of it?
15. Read 1 Timothy 6:9-10 and answer the following questions.
- What kind of trap is described in these verses?
 - What is the bait?
 - What can be the consequences of this trap?
 - Do you think anyone who desires to be rich wants to suffer the consequences described in verse 10? Why or why not?
16. Read Ecclesiastes 5:11-12. What is the consequence for those who live for the accumulation of goods as described in verse 12? How can the accumulation of too many things adversely affect this area of your life?
17. How important is sleep to the quality of your life?
18. An estimated 164 million Americans struggle to get a good night's sleep at least once a week and in 2015 spent an estimated \$41 billion on sleeping aids and remedies. Clearly, Americans have sleep issues. What steps could you take to reduce your stress in order to improve the quality of your sleep, i.e., get rid of clothes you no longer wear to make it easier to find what you'd like to wear?
19. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you see things you can trim from your life to make it easier to rest and experience sweet sleep

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

20. I recently purchased a beautiful teakwood napkin & utensil holder from Costco on impulse. It seemed the perfect thing to keep my utensils organized. When I opened the box at home, the lengthy care instructions included a *weekly* polishing with olive oil. I intended this object to serve me, not expect a weekly massage. Have you ever purchased something and realized that the upkeep was going to be much more work than you had anticipated? What was the fate of that item?

21. Are you in the habit of considering the upkeep on something before you purchase it? How might doing this affect your purchases? Would you be more or less likely to make a purchase if you did consider that factor?
22. Read Luke 12:15 and write in your own words the warning in this passage.
23. Do you feel as though you can appreciate all the possessions you have or is there a point where your enjoyment of any one thing decreases because of the responsibility of maintaining your possessions?
24. Read Ecclesiastes 5:13. How can you tell if you've reached the point where the possessions you've accumulated are causing you harm? (Hint, see Day Three's study this week.)
25. Finish your FIFTEEN by taking some time to thank God for the possessions He's given you. Then ask Him to help you see if there is something out of your abundance with which you need to bless someone else.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

26. If you're doing this study on day five of this week, it's been just over a month since Christmas. Think back to a Christmas gift you were pretty excited to receive. How do you feel about it now? Has the feeling faded? Explain your answer.
27. Some gifts can be satisfying on their own, but often the intention behind the gift makes the appreciation of the gift have staying power, even after the gift is gone. What makes the intention behind a gift so powerful?
28. Read Ecclesiastes 5:13-15. How can wealth be hoarded to the harm of its owner?
29. We've all heard horror stories of people filling their homes with duplicates of many items in case they're needed someday. What often drives people to hoard things?
30. What often happens to all of their belongings after they are no longer living in their homes because of death or inability to care for themselves?
31. Read Proverbs 11:25-26. What is the result of hoarding versus living generously?
32. I once had a wise friend tell me that I had a faith issue after I had admitted holding on to things that I knew I'd never use again, but I was keeping them just in case I needed them. She asked me if it would be better to give those things to someone I knew would use them, trusting God to provide for me if ever I needed them, versus keeping them and hoping they'd be used. How does her advice affect your perspective on holding on to things you no longer use?

33. Ecclesiastes 5:15 reminds us that everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. As you conclude your FIFTEEN, ask God to help you develop a plan to simplify your surroundings by keeping material possessions in perspective.

Week Five – *Refocus Your Attitude*

Romans 12:9-21

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. If forced to choose, which do you think impacts your satisfaction in life more, external circumstances or internal attitude? Why?
2. Part of making a clean slate of your life starts with refocusing your attitude. Look at Romans 12:2. Which part of us does Paul suggest that we should transform?
3. This might seem easier said than done. Of what methods have you heard for refocusing your attitude?
4. Now look at Romans 12:9-21. What kinds of things does Paul tell us to do in order to change our attitudes?
5. Which of the actions on this list come easily to you? Why?
6. Which of the actions on this list are difficult for you? Why?
7. Even if we can't forcibly change the way we think, we can change what we *do*, and then let our habits transform our mind. This week, let's change what we read. We will focus each day on a proverb, and see what different actions it prescribes. Close in your FIFTEEN in prayer, asking God to help you see clearly the areas of attitude in which you should focus.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. This week we're following a popular discipline of reading a daily proverb that matches the day's date. So today, start by reading Proverbs 31:1-9.
9. What should the goals of leaders be?
10. Look again at verses 8 and 9. What opportunities have you had to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves or to defend the rights of the poor and needy?
11. Now read Proverbs 31:10-31. This passage describes a noble wife. Which of these traits are still relevant today? Which of these are maybe not as relevant?
12. How do these descriptions in this section compare to the description of a noble leader from verses 1-9?

13. What is one trait from this proverb that you could attempt to put into practice today?

14. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to give you the ability to put that trait in to practice.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. This week we're following a popular discipline of reading a daily proverb that matches the day's date. Today, start by reading Proverbs 1:1-7. What does the introduction say is the purpose for all these proverbs?

16. According to verse 7, from where does wisdom come?

17. Does having fear of the Lord sound like a good thing? Why do you think the Bible tells us to do something that sounds so negative?

18. What do you think it looks like to fear the Lord? In what ways do you show fear of the Lord in your own life?

19. Verse 7 gives us a hint of what fear of the Lord looks like. What three things does it say we should have in our lives?

20. Look at verses 32 and 33. What are the two possible outcomes for people at the end of their lives?

21. End your FIFTEEN by asking God to always guide you according to His wisdom and to lead you to His peace at the end of time.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. This week we're following a popular discipline of reading a daily proverb that matches the day's date. So today, start by reading Proverbs 2. What is the main theme of this proverb?

23. Look again at verses 1-5. What does the process of finding wisdom look like?

24. Skim through the proverb again and underline all the times it uses the word way or path. What do the different paths described look like?

25. What has made it hard in your own life to stay on God's path of wisdom?

26. Now read Acts 9:2. What were Christians called during the early days of the Church?
27. Who is the way to wisdom now? (See John 14:6 if you need help with this answer.)
28. As you conclude in prayer, pray for Christ Jesus to be your path and to lead you toward His wisdom all the days of your life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. This week we're following a popular discipline of reading a daily proverb that matches the day's date. So today, start by reading Proverb 3. What themes continue in this proverb?
30. Look at verses 5 and 6. How realistic is this advice? How easy is to avoid relying on your own understanding?
31. Look at verses 13-18. In these verses, Wisdom is personified, meaning "described like a person." Like what kind of person is Wisdom described?
32. In this section, Wisdom sounds a lot like the noble wife from Proverbs 31. How does this metaphor make you understand Wisdom differently?
33. This proverb describes Wisdom as someone with whom you would have a life-long relationship. What would it look like to have a relationship with Wisdom?
34. Read verses 27-32. How would a life-long relationship with Wisdom change the way you interact with people around you?
35. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask for God to help you have a life marked by a life-long pursuit of His wisdom.