

**Growing Deeper**  
*PB&J Creating Connections*

**Week One: Created for Connection**  
*Hebrews 10:19-25*

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day One**

1. When was the first time you left home for an extended time? Was it harder on you or on your immediate family? Why?
2. Why do you think God caused the human race to require the nurture of a family for such a long time? (Many, if not most, animals are born nearly independent of their mother or require a much shorter time of family care and protection.)
3. What's the upside of being raised in a family unit? What's the potential downside?
4. Once, when Jesus' family came to care for Him, He responded with the words in Matthew 12:47-49. What do you think Jesus meant?
5. Read 1 Timothy 5:1-2. How does this apply to your understanding of Christian friends?
6. When Jesus taught His disciples (and us, too), how to pray in the Lord's prayer, how did He urge us to address God? Why choose such an intimate term as father? (Most religions would not allow their followers to address God using such a tender term.)
7. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, pray a prayer of gratitude for your family of origin or for those that cared and nurtured you as a child.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two**

8. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. What are the main themes of this section of Scripture?
9. What enables us to connect in confidence with our Heavenly Father?
10. What does this passage suggest is the main reason we should connect with other Christians on a consistent basis?
11. Some argue they don't need to be regular or faithful in worship or Christian fellowship. They can just as easily study their Bibles on their own or worship via live stream without ever setting foot in a church. Are they right? What might they be missing?

12. Is gathering together with other Christians urged mostly for our benefit or the benefit of others? Explain.
13. Describe loneliness. Have you ever suffered a long period of isolation or loneliness? Why is finding time to be alone a good thing, but loneliness is not? What's the difference?
14. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for all lonely people who don't feel the love and support of others in their lives.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three**

15. Hebrews 10:23 urges us to “hold unswervingly to hope we profess.” What is the hope we profess? See Hebrews 6:19-20 for insight.
16. Is this hope only the assurance of eternal life after death to those who believe or is it more than that? Explain.
17. How does hope in God change your attitude about today, tomorrow and eternity?
18. On what is your hope based? What concrete reason(s) do you have to trust in God to provide all you need in life and in death?
19. Read Ecclesiastes 4:8-12. What benefits are suggested for those who have important connections to other people in life?
20. People to people connections are important for believers and nonbelievers. Why would a connection to people of faith be an even greater advantage?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying for the ability to be the kind of friend to others that you would like to have for yourself.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four**

22. Read Hebrews 10:23 again. What makes the faithfulness of God so important?
23. Read Hebrews 10:24. How can we persuade others to greater love and good deeds? Suggest at least three ways you might achieve that noble calling.

24. It has been said that “well done is better than well said.” What does that mean? Do you agree?
25. In Texas, they say a phony person is “all hat and no cattle.” Describe a phony friend.
26. If you have fallen short of true friendship, what could you do to turn the page and be the kind of friend who makes a difference in the life of another person. Suggest three ways you could regain a former friend’s trust.
27. Read Romans 12: 9-21. What piece of advice offered by God in those verses seems most important to you at this point in your life? Why?
28. Read the lyrics to the first verse of the old hymn; “What a Friend We have in Jesus.”
- What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh, what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!”
- What point is the author making about true friendship?
29. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Offer a prayer of thanks for the faithful friendship of Jesus in your life.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five**

30. Read Hebrews 10:25. What reason(s) do people give for not gathering together with other Christians?
31. A growing number of younger Christians claim they still believe in Jesus but don’t believe in the organized religion. Do you think they have good reasons for rejecting organized religion or is this just an excuse or a sign of spiritual immaturity?
32. What ultimate reason does the author of this verse give for connecting with other Christians?
33. How can you give and receive Christian support if you refuse to associate with other people of faith?
34. Other than person renewal and affirmation of other Christians, what other important reasons do Christians have for working together?

35. What could your congregation do to encourage Christians to be more sensitive to each other and thus fulfill the law of Christ? See Galatians 6:1-3 for additional insight.
  
36. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer by praying for eyes to see the hidden needs and insecurities of others within your sphere of influence.

**Week Two: *Seeing Differences Differently***  
***Romans 12:3-10***

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day One**

1. Do you have a large group of acquaintances or a smaller group of close friends with whom you tend to socialize most often? Why do you prefer one over the other?
2. Do those in your circle of friends share your faith, politics and interests or are they mostly different from you? What's the upside of that arrangement? What's the downside?
3. Social media has developed algorithms that sort what stories you see and whose posts you see on the basis of your preferences as shown by the subjects you read and the things you post. How can that distort reality?
4. When it comes to news, where do you go to catch up on current events? What point of view does that represent most often?
5. Read Revelation 7:9 and Jesus' words from Matthew 5:43-47. What do those passages suggest about God's preference regarding diversity in relationships and friendships?
6. Have you ever been in a relationship with someone completely different from you that took some getting used to but eventually became a blessing to you both? Explain.
7. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying for an open heart to be more tolerant and accepting of people different from you.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two**

8. Read Romans 12:3-10. Of the various gifts listed, which is most appealing to you? Which one is least appealing to you?
9. From verse 3, what's the difference between not thinking too highly of yourself and having low self-esteem?
10. What does grace have to do with it? In other words, if God gives faith to all believers, what does that imply when it comes to accepting differences in people?"
11. How would you define toleration? Is it the acceptance of common ground (meeting in the middle), compromise of your position to accommodate the position of another person or respectfully agreeing to disagree (or something else)?

12. Read Mark 9:38-41. Can you have unity without strict uniformity? Explain.
13. It is often said that truth matters and we should search the scriptures to discern God's intended meaning on every issue, but if other Christians teach some things contrary to our beliefs, but celebrate Christmas, Easter and teach that Jesus is the needed Savior of the world; that's ok. Do you agree? Can a church be wrong on the number and purpose of the sacraments but still be comprised of brothers and sisters in faith?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater patience for those who are immature in faith... including yourself.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three**

15. Read Romans 12:4-5. Why do you think God uses the metaphor of one body but different members so often in the New Testament?
16. NFL superstars have been sidelined with turf-toe or a pulled hamstring, but if you listed the most important physical qualities of an NFL superstar, it is doubtful you would list either of these body parts in the top five. What practical lessons can we take from this example?
17. Do you know of anyone who has overcome a physical challenge to accomplish something truly remarkable? Is it possible for the Christian church to still accomplish its intended purpose despite the challenge of some who refuse to participate fully? Who is the greatest loser in that scenario, the mission or the one who avoids the mission?
18. Not everyone is called to serve the same purpose in the Body of Christ. How would you define your purpose?
19. What obligation (if any) do you have toward members of the Body of Christ whose purpose is different from your own?
20. Romans 12:4-5 describes many members but one body. What unites the different members into one defining purpose? Explain.
21. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer by praying to recognize and more highly value members of the Body of Christ who are different from yourself.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four**

22. Read Romans 12:6. According to the opening comment, why do gifts differ between people? What is the cause of that?

23. Why does that factor eliminate any reason for pride or possible shame in the embracing of your gift or the gifts of others?
24. Those who have gifts are expected by God to exercise them. Describe some of the excuses you've heard others (or maybe even yourself) give for not using their gifts for the good of the Body of Christ?
25. How can we adjust our thinking about our gifts to overcome our own excuses?
26. Paul talks about using your gifts in proportion to your faith. What do you think he meant by that?
27. Do some people have more faith and greater gifts? Do some people you know have greater gifts but little faith? What are the implications of that observation?
28. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God for greater faith to believe that with Him all things are possible.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five**

29. Read Romans 12:9-10. To quote a famous pop song, “What’s love got to do with it?” Why is love necessary in our interactions with others?
30. Explain the concept of unconditional love.
31. What does it mean to “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (verse 9)? Is it possible to hate the sin but love the sinner? Explain.
32. How often do you think those are the attitudes of Christians toward each other?
33. How can a Christian be devoted to another person in a spirit of brotherly love? What does that look like?
34. Read Philippians 2:5-8. Explain the example Jesus provided in giving preference to you and me over Himself? What are the implications of His actions?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater unity in your congregation and between your congregation and Christians in other churches.

**Week Three: *Fighting for Connection (instead of just fighting)***  
***Matthew 5:21-26***

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day One**

1. If you had to rate your personal connection with God on a scale of 1-10, where would you rate it? Why did you pick that particular number?
2. When it comes to your relationship with God, who invests more in it—God or you?
3. Read Romans 5:8. What first step did God have to take in order to have relationship with us? What does that show about his willingness to fight for connection with us?
4. In what ways are you able to reciprocate, to fight for your relationship with God? In other words, what actions do you take to keep your relationship with God strong?
5. What effect does it have on God's love and affection for you, if you ever stop putting effort into your time with Him?
6. Read 2 Timothy 2:13. What promise does God make about his approach to connecting with us, even if we don't reach out to Him?
7. As you conclude your FIFTEEN, pray and thank God for His faithfulness! Give Him glory because He gave His Son in order to connect with us, and because He will never cease fighting for His relationship with us.

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two**

8. What is one thing that would be a deal-breaker if a friend ever did it to you? Why would this action be more unforgivable than other things?
9. Is there something you regret doing to a friend or loved one? How did the relationship change after you did this thing?
10. When it comes to rules for relationships, Jesus summarized the whole 10 Commandments into two laws. Read Matthew 22:34-40. What were Jesus' big two?
11. We know we've all fallen short of these commandments in some way. But let's get specific. Look up the 5th commandment: Exodus 20:13. Have you ever broken this law?

12. For most of us, this probably seems like a no-brainer. But let's see how Jesus applied this commandment: Read Matthew 5:21-22. Based on Jesus' interpretation, did your answer to the first question change? What is an instance when you broke the 5th commandment?
13. Unforgiven anger kills a relationship in much the same way that murder kills a person. Are there any relationships that you have killed because you never resolved anger with someone?
14. As you finish your FIFTEEN, lift up any relationships like that in prayer. Ask God to forgive you for your anger. Ask Him also to fill you with hope for your connection with that person, so that you could try to reach out again and love him or her the way Christ does.

### **Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three**

15. It is hard to fight for connection. We all probably have relationships that have fallen apart. Who are some people with whom you used to be close but have now drifted apart or you no longer speak? (As an example, think of Angela's relationship with her sister from The Office: [youtube.com/watch?v=RHwpFrsWJh8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHwpFrsWJh8) )
16. Thinking back on those lapsed relationships, what did you do, if anything, to fight for them?
17. Look again at the passage from yesterday: Matthew 5:23-26. What instructions did Jesus give beyond simply not being angry with our neighbors?
18. This might seem like an unfair expectation. If we acted the way Jesus instructs, how might others take advantage of us?
19. It's helpful to read how Martin Luther explained this passage: "under this commandment not only he is guilty who does evil to his neighbor, but he also who can do him good, prevent, resist evil, defend and save him, so that no bodily harm or hurt happen to him, and yet does not do it." In what specific ways does this expand on what Jesus said?
20. What are examples of ways you followed (or didn't follow) Luther's advice when a relationship started to go south?
21. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer, asking forgiveness for any times when you didn't fight for a relationship. Also thank God for the healthy relationships you do have. Ask for His help to guide and strengthen you as you try to love people in spite of how hard that might be to do.

### **Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four**

22. Are there any people in your life with whom you're not at peace right now?

23. Read Romans 12:18. What is Paul's command regarding peace in our relationships? How hard is this command for you in general?
24. Picture people you know who tend to be at peace with everyone. What are some of their traits or attitudes that help them do this?
25. Luckily for us, Paul did give us some practical tips for how to be people of peace. Read Colossians 3:12-17. What different advice does Paul give here?
26. Which of Paul's suggestions come easily to you? Which suggestion would you need to work on?
27. Think of a person from the first question. Based on this passage, what is one thing you could do differently in that relationship?
28. As you finish your FIFTEEN, ask God to give you courage. Pray that He fills you with His Spirit of peace, and uses you to bring peace to others.

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five**

29. Sometimes it's hard to admit we need help, but Jesus talks about what to do when we've reached our limit in a relationship: Matthew 18:15-20. Read this passage.
30. Would you describe this as a negative process or a positive process? Why?
31. For what outcome would Jesus (and the person leading this process) desire and hope?
32. Verse 17 talks about the consequence of a failed reconciliation. Do you think this is an appropriate outcome or an unfair one? Why?
33. The negative consequence seems pretty harsh - treat them like a pagan or tax collector. On the other hand, how are we supposed to treat people outside the church? (See Col. 4:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:15 for help with this question.)
34. Is there anyone in your life whom you've given up on, without going through this process for reconciliation? What can you do to reinvest in that relationship and find a way to give them every chance to be restored?

35. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer for this person who is currently in a broken relationship with you. Ask God for help through a wise and godly person whom you can ask to help you attempt to rebuild your connection with this person. Commit to following through within one week.

**Week 4 - *The Lure of False Connection***  
***Proverbs 27:5-10***

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day One**

1. When it comes to your drinking habits, do you favor real sugar (or high-fructose corn syrup) or artificial sweeteners? Why did you make that choice?
  
2. For years, artificial sweetener has been touted as the healthier option, but evidence is beginning to show that these substitute sugars trigger brain and body responses differently than real sugar. (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/tricking-taste-buds-but-not-the-brain-artificial-sweeteners-change-braine28099s-pleasure-response-to-sweet/>) In short, your brain thinks it's getting the same thing as real sugar, but the body is not able to process it the same way. Put on your scientist hat for a moment. Why might this be a bad thing?
  
3. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman points out that the community of social media is similarly artificial. "Communities aren't created, and you either have one or you don't. What the social networks can create is a substitute. The difference between a community and a network is that you belong to a community, but a network belongs to you....Social media are very useful, they provide pleasure, but they are a trap." ([http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/19/inenglish/1453208692\\_424660.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/19/inenglish/1453208692_424660.html)) In a given day, how do you spend more time, interacting with friends in person or interacting with friends via digital technology?
  
4. If you didn't have access to social technology (texts, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), would you be more or less motivated to meet with friends in person?
  
5. Now read Proverbs 27:7. How would you rephrase the point of this proverb in contemporary language?
  
6. Social media, like artificial sweetener, can make us feel like we're full, so we no longer need, and maybe even loathe, the real honey of true relationships. Take a moment and reflect on your own digital/physical balance of connecting. How would you rate real honey versus artificial sweets?
  
7. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for the true community that He's placed all around you. Ask Him to help you develop even sweeter connections with those in your life.

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two**

8. If you suddenly got great news, who would be the first person with whom you'd share it?
  
9. Who is your "A good friend will help you move, but a true friend will help you move a body" friend?
  
10. How long did it take to develop that kind of relationship with the person you listed above?

11. Proverbs 27:10 shares an important truth about true connections. Turn there and read it. What comparison does this proverb make between family and such a friend?
12. Are you someone that your friends would turn to if they experienced a disaster? How have you demonstrated that reliability to them?
13. Who is someone that you could reach out to this week and affirm your willingness to be their “friend indeed”?
14. End your FIFTEEN by thanking God that He has provided you with reliable friends or ask Him to help you develop those kinds of sure relationships.

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three**

15. If you were listening to a speaker and they said something wrong, would you correct them? What about if a friend said something in error?
16. Take two minutes to watch this interesting summary of the Asch experiment: [youtube.com/watch?v=qA-gbpt7Ts8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qA-gbpt7Ts8)  
What do you think you would do if you had participated in this exercise?
17. Because we are social creatures, designed for community, conformity is a powerful force on us. What impact should this fact have on the kinds of people with whom we surround ourselves?
18. Read Proverbs 26:17-22. What is a common theme between these proverbs?
19. The Bible is clear that we should avoid those who are complaining or negative or gossipy. Have you known someone who always turned a conversation negative? What impact did that have on you or the social environment?
20. Have you ever fallen into that trap yourself? Are there times you have been the negative influence on others?
21. Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN in prayer asking God for forgiveness for any times where you have been a part of an unhealthy dynamic. Ask Him to guide you away from those kinds of relationships in the future and ask Him to help you not be that kind of negative person going forward.

**Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four**

22. Once I was in a fantasy football league and didn't find out about a co-player's new baby until after the season ended! Have you ever been surprised to find out something about someone you thought you knew? What was the situation?

23. It is good to have friendships of different levels: acquaintances, friends and people you trust deeply. However, sometimes relationships get stuck at one level. Who is someone in your life with whom you'd like to be better or more intentional friends?
24. Read Proverbs 27:17. What does this metaphor mean?
25. Have you ever been sharpened because someone invested in you? Who was it?
26. Now read Titus 2:2-6. What kind of intentional relationship does Paul say Christians should have with one another?
27. At St. John, we use 1. 1. 15. 6. to remind us of four parts of the LIFEjourney. The second "1" is to be someONE to another person in an intentional relationship. Who is someone in your life in whom you can invest, deepen your relationship or encourage to be sharpened by the Holy Spirit?
28. As you finish your FIFTEEN, pray for this person. Ask God to give you the opportunity to invest in this person in the coming weeks and months.

#### **Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five**

29. Name someone with whom you can be vulnerable. How has he or she allowed you to feel comfortable doing so?
30. Comedian John Mulaney shares how hard it is when people know the thing you're secretly sensitive about in this quote: "Thirteen-year-olds are the meanest people in the world. They terrify me to this day, because 8th graders will make fun of you but in an accurate way. They will get to the thing that you don't like about you. They don't even have to look at you for long. They'll just be like, 'Ha, ha, ha, ha, hey, look at that high wasted man. He got feminine hips.' And I'm like, 'No! That's the thing I'm sensitive about.'" What is something about which you're sensitive?
31. To have true connection, we have to be willing to be vulnerable with others. Unfortunately, as Brene Brown says, that's very hard to do: "The difficult thing is that vulnerability is the first thing I look for in you and the last thing I'm willing to show you. In you, it's courage and daring. In me, it's weakness." Think of a time when someone else was willing to be vulnerable with you. What response did you have to him or her?
32. Generally, vulnerability arouses our sympathy, but it's still hard to be vulnerable with others. Read Proverbs 27:6. In regular language, what do you think this proverb is saying?
33. People like to joke about having a friend who will help "hide a body." But do you have a friend you can trust to tell you that you have food in your teeth? Who is that friend?

