

Growing Deeper
Divided We Fall

Week One: *The Bridge Builder*
2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. As we dig deeper into what it means to be bridge builders, let's look at how God reconciled, or resolved, our relationship with Him. Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. What does it mean to you to "fear the Lord"?
2. Is it a good thing or a bad thing to "fear the Lord"? Why or why not?
3. Verse 13 talks about being "out of our mind" or fools for God. Can you think of ways that God calls us as Christians to be fools for Him today?
4. Being fools for God can take many forms, but one way is to cross any and all divides to show the love that Christ has for each one of us. What does verse 14 say it is that compels us to do this?
5. Because Christ's love compels us, can you think of some person or some group in your life who you need to go out of your way to show more love to?
6. Part of showing love to people is reconciling with them, restoring a broken relationship or even building a new one. How often do others hurt us or we hurt them, whether intentional or not?
7. Have you felt God calling you to reconcile with someone, even if it still hurts? Imagine what our world would look like if we always reconciled with others as Christ commanded.
8. As you finish your FIFTEEN, spend some time in prayer thanking God for how much He loves you. Ask Him to help you see the divides He wants you to cross to love some person or group you currently aren't.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

9. As a reminder, our text for this week is 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. As we continue to dig deeper, it may be a good idea to read these verses again each day.
10. Who does verse 15 say we should live for?
11. In our world today, is it easy or hard to live for Jesus? Why?

12. Now read Romans 5:10-11. How were we reconciled with God?
13. Why do you think God would reconcile with us even while we were His enemies?
14. Did Jesus die for everyone who loves Him? Or did He die for *everyone*, whether they love Him or not?
15. Does the magnitude of the love of Christ motivate or inspire you to cross more divides in order to better reconcile and love others? Why or why not?
16. Throughout the rest of today, seriously consider who you are living for. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to help show you any idols you may have in your life or any priorities that you value more than Him. Often, how we spend our time, money, and energy is a reflection of what “master” we really serve. Be honest with yourself and with God about who you really are living for.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

17. Read Matthew 5:23-24. What does Jesus command us to do before giving Him our gifts?
18. Why do you think Jesus said to first reconcile with one another before worshipping Him with our gifts?
19. Read Colossians 1:19-22. Would it have been possible for us to reconcile ourselves to God without Him? Could we have done it on our own? Why or why not?
20. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, how are we now presented before God?
21. How do we typically view people? Do we see them as the world does or as Jesus does? If you are living for Jesus and have made Him master of your life, how *should* you view others?
22. As you finish your FIFTEEN, pray that you would see others as Jesus sees them. Ask Him to give you the love and concern for them that He has for you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

23. Read Ephesians 4:32. Is Paul *recommending* that we be kind and compassionate to each other? Or does it sound more like a command?

24. In light of Christ forgiving us, what gets in the way of us forgiving others?
25. What controls your life? What is the greatest desire of your heart that you would sacrifice anything for?
26. Since Christ died for you, what should you be willing to do for Him?
27. What are some simple, practical ways you can live for Him? What does living and loving like Jesus look like?
28. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, consider how different your life would look if you were living “all out” for Jesus. Would it look a lot different? Pray that the Holy Spirit would work in you to help you live more and more like Christ calls us to live.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Verse 21 of our text says, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” Why would God do this?
30. If you’re really able to grasp and understand the magnitude of God’s love for you, how does that make you feel?
31. Read 2 Corinthians 5:20 again. What does it mean to be an ambassador of Christ?
32. What responsibility comes with being Christ’s ambassadors?
33. As ambassadors or agents of Jesus, should we live and love like the rest of the world or like Jesus?
34. Finish your final FIFTEEN of the week with this: Being nearly 2,000 years removed from the time of Christ, it can be hard to fully comprehend what Jesus did for us. Spend some time in prayer asking God to open your mind to really understand how much He loves you and to thank Him for that love and what He’s done because of that love. Also pray that He would give you the power and strength to cross the divides that He is calling you to cross in order to better live and love as He does.

Week Two: *We Get Near*
John 4 (selected verses)

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Read John 4:1-9 and answer the following questions:
 - a. Why did Jesus leave the area?

- b. Where was He going?
 - c. Why did He take that route?
 - d. What assumption did the Pharisees make about Jesus?
2. Do you ever go out of your way to avoid something or someone? Why do you do it? (Example: you avoid a crime-ridden area on your commute, or take the back exit from your work to avoid coworkers)
 3. Why did most Jews in Jesus' day avoid Samaria? (See verse 9)
 4. In verse 4, the Bible says that Jesus had to go through Samaria. Since most Jews in Jesus' day successfully avoided the area by going around it, what other reasons might Jesus have that compelled Him to go through Samaria?
 5. As we will see as our study this week progresses, Jesus was a man on a mission. He had business in Samaria. When you think about the areas you sometimes avoid, is it possible that God could have work for you in those places? What might that be in your case?
 6. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you be open to hearing Him speak to you this week as we continue to reflect on what it means to get near.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

7. Read John 4:7-9. For what two reasons was the woman surprised that Jesus asked her for a drink?
8. On what basis did the woman make this judgment about Jesus? Was it a reasonable assumption for her to make about Jesus?
9. When people meet you, is there anything about you that might cause them to make an assumption about you? Do you feel as though their assumption is justified? Why or why not?
10. If someone makes an assumption about you, how do you typically react?
11. How did the woman respond to Jesus' request for water?
12. How might understanding Jesus' motive have helped this women understand who Jesus was?

13. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Confess those times where you have wrongly made assumptions about others, then ask God to help you to remember to ask questions before making assumptions of others.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

14. Look again at John 4:7-9. In your opinion, what is the woman's tone toward Jesus? Does the woman seem afraid of Jesus, angry, insulted, embarrassed, or something else? Explain your answer.

15. Continue reading John 4:10-15. Does the nature of their ongoing conversation suggest to you anything about what their attitude toward each other might have been?

16. How important is tone when you are asking someone for a favor? How about when someone asks you for a favor?

17. It's pretty hard to judge tone from this portion of the narrative, but Jesus and this woman somehow felt comfortable enough to continue talking. What does it take for you to feel comfortable when talking to a stranger? Does it come naturally to you or do you avoid such situations?

18. How can you display a tone of openness and friendliness when you engage someone who does not know you?

19. Close your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you to always speak in a manner that allows others to feel comfortable talking to you.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

20. Read John 4:9-26. How did the fact that Jesus knew all about her secrets, yet was a stranger to her, impact the woman?

21. Jesus' knowledge of her was truly miraculous and evidence of God's divine nature. The way we often know secrets about each other is through gossip. How does that change the value of knowing other's secrets?

22. Have you ever brought a friend to church, and because of what you knew about him or her, you listened to the service from their perspective? How did that influence how you felt about what was experienced in worship?

23. When you think about that experience, what could be done better to make that person feel included?

24. Was there anything you could have done differently to prepare your friend?

25. An old saying goes something like this: “Before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes.” How can you do this better as a person, not just as a Christian?
26. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you to be more empathetic to the situations of others.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

27. Read John 4:27-42. How did the disciples react when they returned and found Jesus with the woman?
28. For once in their lives, none of the disciples voiced the questions they were thinking. Why do you suppose they remained quiet?
29. We can't know for sure their reasons for their seemingly sudden restraint. How would you have reacted in their place? Would you have been able to restrain yourself or would you want answers from Jesus?
30. It's possible that the disciples were so stunned by Jesus' behavior that they remained quiet, or it's possible that this behavior was so rare to them they did not even know how to hold a conversation with a woman, much less a foreign one, in public. If we are being truly honest, is there anyone that you would feel uncomfortable talking to, especially in public? What about them would make you uncomfortable?
31. Heineken Beer produced an ad about getting near people that are different from us. Search #OpenYourWorld on YouTube or use this link. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etIqIn7vT4w> The pairs in this ad bonded over a shared project, but they also had meaningful conversations. What steps could you take to get to know people with whom you are uncomfortable?
32. How can you have more meaningful conversations with them?
33. End your FIFTEEN by confessing any reluctance you may feel in getting close to people. Then close your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you cross divides as Jesus has modeled for us.

Week Three: *We Change the Script* ***Matthew 15:21-26***

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. As we prepare to dig deeper into what it means to change the script like Jesus did, read Matthew 15:21-28.
2. Verse 21 says, “Leaving that place, Jesus *withdrew*.” *Withdrew* seems to be an important word in that sentence. Do you think he was tired and not wanting to be bothered?

3. Assuming Jesus and His disciples were “laying low” and resting, how do you think the Canaanite woman knew where they were?
4. What did the Canaanite woman call Jesus? What label did she use? (verse 22)
5. Why do you think she called Jesus what she did?
6. How do *you* refer to Jesus? What do *you* call Him?
7. Does the name you use for Jesus indicate a *close* relationship with Him? Or is it more formal, stuffy, and distant?
8. As you finish your FIFTEEN, consider where you stand with God. As Christians, we never “fully arrive” or reach the end of our faith journey. No matter where you are in your journey, ask Him to draw you closer to Him than you currently are.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

9. Read Matthew 15:22 again. How do you think the Canaanite woman knew who Jesus was?
10. Being both a Canaanite and a woman in Jesus’ day would have been two negative labels. Did Jesus acknowledge her label and treat her accordingly? How did Jesus initially respond to the woman?
11. Why do you think Jesus ignored the Canaanite woman when she first spoke to Him?
12. Was Jesus being rude by ignoring the woman when her daughter was in desperate need of help?
13. Think of a time when you took a concern or request to God and it felt like He was ignoring you. How did that feel?
14. Looking back now, was He actually ignoring you? Or was He really working things out according to His better plan?
15. Do you wear or carry any labels? Do you treat others according to the label they carry? If so, how *should* you both view and treat them?

16. As you finish your FIFTEEN for today, think about how you treat others. Do you allow labels to affect how you treat people? Thank God that He sees you as you truly are and ask Him to allow you to see others in the same way.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

17. As we prepare to dig deeper into what it means to change the script like Jesus did and see *people* instead of labels, it would be a good idea to read Matthew 15:21-28 again.

18. What did Jesus' disciples tell Him about the woman in verse 23?

19. Who are "the lost sheep of Israel" that Jesus refers to in verse 24?

20. Are Jesus' words in verse 24 confusing to you? Why or why not?

21. Do His words make it sound like being a follower of Jesus requires exclusive access or membership? Why do you think He said what He did?

22. Can you think of a time when you were treated like an outsider or made to feel not welcome? How did it make you feel?

23. Imagine how easily Jesus could have made the Canaanite woman feel more unwelcome than she likely already did. But He didn't. Do *you* ever go out of your way to make sure others feel included? Or do you treat people according to the labels they've been given? Why?

24. Before finishing your FIFTEEN for today, thank God that all of us are welcome in His family and kingdom. Thank Him for never treating us according to our labels or pasts. Spend some time praying, as you feel led, concerning how you treat others and how you *should* treat others.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

25. As we continue to dig deeper into what it means to change the script like Jesus did and see *people* instead of labels, read Matthew 15:21-28 again.

26. Put yourself in the Canaanite woman's shoes. After Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel," would you have given up?

27. Had the Canaanite woman not been as persistent as she was, do you think Jesus would have healed her daughter?

28. Read Luke 19:1-10. In these verses, Jesus meets Zacchaeus and goes to visit him in his home. How was Zacchaeus viewed? What was his label? (verse 7)

29. How did Jesus view Zacchaeus? What did He call him? (verse 9)

30. According to verse 10, who did Jesus say He came for?

31. As you finish your FIFTEEN, think about what divides you can cross to show love to those you normally avoid. Is there a certain person or group you've been deliberately avoiding? Pray that God would give you the strength and love to share His love with them.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

32. Before starting your final FIFTEEN of the week, read Matthew 15:21-28 again.

33. In Matthew 15:27, the Canaanite woman affirms what Jesus said and calls herself a dog. Had she gotten mad and walked away instead, what do you think would have happened?

34. In verse 28, Jesus is clearly impressed with the woman's faith. She was persistent and shameless in her faith. Are there times in your past when you couldn't swallow your pride and as a result limited what God could do?

35. Notice that each time the woman speaks to Jesus, she calls Him "Lord." Do you believe that was an indication of her faith or was she just referring to Him like His disciples did?

36. Read Luke 18:1-8, the parable of the persistent widow. Had the widow given up and stopped asking for the justice she desired, would she have received it?

37. In verses 6-7, Jesus says, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?" What do these verses mean to you?
38. If even a bad judge will give to those who ask, what do you think your loving Father God will do for you?
39. As you finish your FIFTEEN for the week, thank God for how much He loves you and for all He has done for you. Ask Him to give you the will, strength, and persistence to serve and follow Him day after day.