

Growing Deeper
Divided We Fall

Week Four: *We Resist Stances*
Matthew 22:15-22

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Begin this week by reading Matthew 22:15-22. What had the Pharisees planned to do in verse 15?
2. Earlier in Matthew, in 12:14, they had plotted in the same way. Why do you think they spent so much time and energy plotting to trap Jesus?
3. Verse 16 says that the Pharisees “sent their disciples” to Jesus. Why do you think they sent their disciples, essentially their “JV” squad?
4. If the Pharisees’ disciples, amateurs, were able to get the best of Jesus, that would make their victory even better. But, if they failed to trap Him, the Pharisees themselves would not look bad. This shows just how much thought they had given to tricking Jesus. Although it’s a coward move, it’s also smart on their part. What does this say about the character of the Pharisees?
5. What, if anything, do you know about the Herodians? They are only mentioned a few times in the New Testament. Based on their name, we can assume that they are followers of and support King Herod. Historians tell us they were in conflict with the Pharisees, but their hatred of Jesus brought them together in this instance. How have you seen common enemies become allies around a common foe?
6. Can you almost hear the sarcasm in verse 16? They say, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.” When they say, “You pay no attention to who they are,” do you think that is an insult or a backhanded compliment?
7. Think of a time when you either felt that you needed to take a stance or made someone else feel that *they* needed to take a stance. Looking back now, was it actually necessary to take a stance, or would it have been more beneficial to not take one?
8. Finish your FIFTEEN for today by asking God to help reveal to you those times when you have hurt others by taking a stance. Pray that, moving forward, God would help you to see His more loving approach to stances.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

9. To begin your FIFTEEN today, read Matthew 22:15-22 again to refresh your memory.
10. Verse 17 says, “Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” What made this question even more problematic is that the imperial tax needed to be paid with a specific kind of coin that had Caesar’s image on it. Since the Jews considered graven images, like the coin with Caesar’s image on it, to be idolatrous, how could Jesus’ answer put Him at odds with the Jews?
11. How would you have responded to this question in verse 17? Remember, the question was carefully worded to only allow for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. If Jesus had answered that the taxes *were* lawful, He would have alienated Himself. But, if He had answered that the taxes *were not* lawful, the Romans could have arrested Him for treason.
12. How does Jesus initially respond to their question? Which option does He choose, if any?
13. Jesus says, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?” Then, He asks to see the coin used for paying the tax. How does He turn the tables on the Pharisees and the Herodians?
14. The Pharisees, who considered themselves the best, most faithful religious folks, who also happen to be standing in the temple (holy ground), immediately pull one of the coins out of their very own pockets. Do you find it hypocritical that the “religious leaders” happen to have coins with graven images on them? Even though refusal to carry these coins would have been inconvenient, it also would have served as a witness to God calling the Jews to be a people set apart from the rest of the culture.
15. Have there been times lately when you’ve been hypocritical towards others? It’s easy to place high expectations on others, while not meeting those expectations ourselves.
16. Finish your FIFTEEN for today by asking God to forgive you for those times when you’ve held too high of expectations for others or been hypocritical towards them. Ask Him to help you treat others, especially those outside of your circle, with the love and acceptance that He has shown to each one of us.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

17. Once again, begin your FIFTEEN for today by reading Matthew 22:15-22. Each time you read it, you’ll likely pick up new things in the passage.
18. After the Pharisees told Jesus that it was in fact Caesar’s image on the coin, how did Jesus respond?

19. Jesus said, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Jesus’ use of the words ‘give back’ implies that the coin originally came from Caesar. So it only seems appropriate then to return the coin to Caesar. It almost sounds like Jesus is saying, “Why are you even asking the question? If it’s Caesar’s coin, give it back to him!” Do you ever feel like you, or we as Christians, make things more complicated than they need to be? If so, give an example.
20. Again, in verse 21 Jesus says, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Read Genesis 1:26-27. In whose image were we made?
21. Since we were made in God’s image, it is appropriate to give ourselves back to God – all we have and all we are. What are some practical, measurable ways that you can give more of yourself back to God? What are some ways you can take that next step in your relationship with Him?
22. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, think about how you can challenge yourself to give more of yourself back to God. Make a plan to move forward in that challenge. Then end in prayer as you feel led.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

23. Read Matthew 22:15-22 again. Jesus’ words in verse 21 seem to be acknowledging the people’s obligation to Caesar, but also affirm their larger obligation to God. The coins with Caesar’s image on them may very well belong to Caesar, but all things, including the coins, Caesar himself, Rome, and the entire universe, ultimately belong to God and are under His control and power. Caesar’s earthly kingdom barely registers within God’s kingdom. How does it feel to know that God has all power and authority over man-made governments?
24. Read Romans 16:17-18. Who or what does it say we are to watch out for?
25. Verse 17 says, “Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.” What does verse 18 say about such people?
26. At the end of verse 17, it says, “Keep away from them.” Why do you think that is?
27. Can you think of a time when you were influenced or guided, in a negative way, by a person or group of people that you knew were not living in accordance with Christ? How did you resolve that or how did that end?
28. As you finish your FIFTEEN for today, spend time throughout the day thinking about Jesus’ approach to stances. He stood for people, not positions. He resisted every attempt by others to force Him to take a

stance. Jesus always put people above any agenda. Pray that, day by day, God would help you and those around you to live more and more like He wants us to, caring more about people than any stance or agenda.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. In Matthew 22:22 we are told, “When they (the Pharisees and Herodians) heard this (what Jesus said), they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.” After spending all that time and planning in hopes of trapping Jesus, how do you think they felt when He slipped away again?
30. Their questions represented the best efforts of their best minds. But, yet again, Jesus slipped away. It’s no wonder they were so amazed. Do you think they were more shocked or angry? Why?
31. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. Like the Romans passage from yesterday, the apostle Paul wrote this one as well. What does it say we should do? Look specifically at verse 10 for the answer.
32. As we know, we will never *always* agree on everything, but Paul does appeal to us to have no divisions among us. How good would you say we are at this, both as Christians and as society in general?
33. Who are some people or groups we follow that divide us today? For example, denominations (Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, etc.) do quite the job of dividing us. Can you think of other, more specific individuals or groups?
34. Christ does not divide; He builds bridges and unites. How can you do a better job in your circle of influence to create unity?
35. As you finish your FIFTEEN for this week, spend some time thinking about what God has done for us. He could very easily be judgmental and divisive, but He isn’t. He loves us with an unconditional love that we can never completely understand. Spend some time in prayer thanking and praising Him for all He has done for you and for us.

Week Five: *We Do Courageous Things*
Mark 6:30-44

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. How much physical rest do you think the average person should get every day in order to be healthy? And then, how do you personally compare? Do you think you're getting more rest? Less? About the same?
2. If you get too little rest, what is keeping you from getting the rest you'd like? If you're getting more than most, what intentional choices have you made that allow that additional rest to happen?
3. Look at how Jesus and the disciples struggled with this issue in Mark 6:30-31. How busy were they?
4. What decision did Jesus make?
5. Do you think Jesus was shirking His responsibilities by leaving the crowd of needy people to get some alone time? Why or why not?
6. What lesson for your own life can you draw from Jesus' priorities in this passage?
7. If you need more rest in your own life, take some time to mark on your calendar where you're going to make the margin for that available in your schedule. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer and ask God to help you make rest a priority.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Picture your normal work flow. How do you feel when someone – a boss, a customer, or coworker – drops a task on your plate without warning?
9. Why does unexpected work feel so different than work you'd already planned on doing?
10. Read what happened to Jesus when He was just trying to get a little break from the demands of His ministry. Mark 6:30-34. What happened in spite of Jesus' attempt to get some rest?
11. What are some different ways that Jesus *could* have responded to this interruption?

12. What does His actual response reveal about His motivations and character?
13. What is one way that God has been compassionate to you when you have struggled?
14. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for His compassionate mercy for you, and ask that He would grant you that same compassion in your interactions with others.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Think of a conflict or crisis that's going on right now. It could be a personal conflict in your life or between friends. It could be a crisis at work or something that's embroiling our country. Once you've thought of one, ask yourself this question: whose fault is this conflict? And why?
16. Once you've gotten your answer, ask yourself a follow-up question: whose responsibility is it to fix this conflict?
17. Are those two answers the same person or group of people? Or are they different? In what circumstances can it be a different person's responsibility to fix something, even if it wasn't their fault in the first place?
18. Now let's look at how a certain situation unfolded for Jesus. Read Mark 6:35-37. What was the problem facing the crowds? Whose fault was this problem?
19. Who did Jesus make responsible for fixing this problem?
20. Is there a conflict or crisis in your life that might not be your fault – you didn't cause it – but it might very well be your responsibility to fix?
21. Pray for God's wisdom to help you take responsibility without blame. If you can't think of a situation that fits, pray that He would reveal to you something that you can take responsibility for in a healthy way.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. What is the easiest part of your job? What is the hardest part of your job?
23. What relationship does the difficulty of a task have with the satisfaction that comes from completing that task?

24. Read Mark 6:35-43. What difficult task did Jesus give His disciples to do? Was it something they were capable of doing on their own?
25. What needed to happen to accomplish this task?
26. Think about the things you're often called on to do. If they're well within your power, how much of God's help do you actually need?
27. What is a big challenge facing you in your life? How can you bring God into that situation? (If you don't have a big challenge, what big thing could God be wanting you to step out in?)
28. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for giving us big (and scary!) things to do. Ask Him for His help and power to accomplish things that would be impossible by your own efforts alone (Matthew 19:26).

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. When was a time where you dreamed big for yourself? Where you strived for something that was exciting and audacious and scary?
30. What was a time when you settled for less than what you hoped for? Where you accepted something that was mediocre and safe instead of exciting and risky?
31. Which one of those situations felt more God-honoring to you? Why?
32. Read the conclusion to the story we've been unpacking this week: Mark 6:44. How did this ending compare with the disciples' expectation of the story? (Go back and re-read verses 30-43 if you need the context.)
33. Place yourself in the disciples' shoes. Would living out this story have inspired you or freaked you out? What would it have felt like to experience Jesus' call to do something miraculous in the middle of ordinary life?
34. Jesus continues to call us to do such things. In Matthew 28:18-20, He asked for His followers to make disciples *of all nations*. There is no person in the world He wanted to be left unreached. Who might God be calling you to in a big (if intimidating) way?

35. End your FIFTEEN by reading Ephesians 2:10. Then pray that God would reveal His big plan for your life in a mighty, powerful, and clear way. You are God's workmanship and He has amazing things in His plan for you to do!

Week Six: *We Celebrate the Friction*

Mark 9:38-50; Colossians 3:8-14

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Think about the different tribes you're a part of: family, faith, political, sports. What are some of the common bonds that unite those tribes?
2. Now think about those tribes some more: how far could someone deviate from the norms of the tribe and still be included? Can someone be a Republican even if they're pro-choice? Can someone be a Christian even if they believe in evolution? Can someone be a Cardinals fan even if they think Yadier Molina is past his prime? What is a different belief someone could have and still be a part of *your* tribe?
3. But what is the one non-negotiable? What thing *must* someone do or believe to be an accepted part of your group?
4. Now read Mark 9:38-41. What was the disciples' concern?
5. What one thing did Jesus call out as sufficient for someone being allied with him and his ministry?
6. As you do some self-reflection, have you more naturally sided with the disciples' position or Jesus' admonition?
7. As we close out a series on "bridging divides," pray for God to reveal obstacles that you have placed in the path of welcoming people into God's covenant community. Ask God to use you to be a welcoming person in a time of division and hostility.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. If you had to describe Jesus' personality in a word or two to someone who didn't know about Him, which words would you pick?
9. Now read Mark 9:42-50. How does this speech from Jesus compare to the personality you described?
10. We often talk about how forgiving Jesus is. But in this speech, what does Jesus say will be the consequences of our own sins?
11. This portion of Jesus' speech seems especially odd, compared to how Jesus began it! Look again at Mark

9:38-41 (the passage from Day One). How would you reconcile these two seemingly contrasting arguments?

12. In verses 38-41, Jesus is talking about how we judge other people. In verses 42-50, He's talking about how we should judge ourselves. What is the difference?
13. In general, how would you evaluate the job that Christians have done of maintaining this kind of distinction? How well do you think you've done at being graciously inclusive of others, while treating your own sins seriously?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN by thanking God for His grace and mercy for all people, even ourselves with our sinful hands, feet, and eyes! Pray that He would help you share His mercy for others, just as He is merciful with you!

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. What is the reason that an unbelieving world should look at Christians and believe in God? In other words, what is our "selling point" which shows that God is true and He loves us? Is it joy? Truth? What one thing would you boil our Christian witness down to?
16. There are a few good answers to that question, but Jesus gives what may seem like an odd choice. Read John 17:20-26. What does Jesus pray for God the Father to give to His disciples so "that the world will know" (NLT) the truth of Jesus' message?
17. Why might this be more foundational to our witness than truth, or hope, or love?
18. By this metric, what grade should the contemporary church receive? (If you need help with this question, google "number of Christian denominations"!)
19. How "unified" do you personally feel with the larger Christian body of believers? Why do you feel that way?
20. This is a big question, and one that we'll more fully explore tomorrow, but think about this: what would it take for Christians to live out the unity that Christ prayed for on our behalf?
21. Pray and ask God to send His Holy Spirit of Unity into you, and all the brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray that He would help His people be the force for unity that He designed us to be.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. What practical skills does it take to maintain "unity" within your family?
23. Read John 17:20-26. How realistic is Jesus' prayer for unity for His followers, do you think? Why?
24. While unity is not impossible, it is certainly difficult. It requires a willingness to be humble and ask questions about the other side. What is a conflict that you are currently going through?
25. Work through these questions from Tim Otto about this struggle: "How is God at work in this conflict? How can we cooperate in the midst of this conflict?"
26. "What might we learn from this conflict about church unity and being one in Christ?"
27. "How can we work to make Jesus' Gethsemane prayer (John 17:20-26) a reality?"
28. End your FIFTEEN by praying and asking God to help and guide your efforts.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. Picture a person who seems to be good at welcoming all different kinds of people. What do you think it is about them that lets them be such a person of peace?
30. Read Colossians 3:8-14. What two ways of living is Paul contrasting?
31. In the "new life in Christ," what kinds of divisions no longer matter? (See v.11)
32. What are the updated 2018 versions of these divisions? What identities divide people nowadays?
33. In verse 12, Paul gives us the "antidote" to divisions. What are they?
34. Of these things we can "clothe" ourselves in, which one comes most easily to you? Which one is the most difficult?

35. Conclude your final FIFTEEN this week by praying to God in His mercy that He would continue to help you develop His virtues for peace: mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.